

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A LOCAL DISTRICT TEACHER INDUCTION  
PROGRAM AND ITS PERCEPTION BY YOUNG EDUCATORS

By

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## ABSTRACT

The findings in this study will add to the body of research regarding improving workplace support for urban educators. One of the major issues in public education today is that of teacher induction. In this study, the researcher explored, through first-hand accounts of early service educators, the perceived effect, in terms of performance in the classroom, readiness to teach, and relationship with the district, of the new-teacher induction process on teachers who have either remained employed in or left the urban district in question.

The research focused on how the new-teacher induction program shaped teacher growth according to those who participated in it. This included determining how the induction program shaped teachers in their pedagogy, culture, and personal level of comfort in the profession and district. The research also determined what differences, if any, existed between the responses of those who left the district and those who stayed.

The method of study was qualitative inquiry. The researcher asked for the *stories* of early career teachers and assessed the relative views and observances of these instructors regarding their experiences with a specific induction program.

Teachers were not sure that the induction program in question had affected their teaching pedagogy. Culturally, the teachers were sure that the program helped them better understand children of poverty and those who grow up in an urban environment. The teachers universally expressed frustration at not being able to get accustomed to their individual schools. There was a slight difference in answers between those who

had left and those who stayed. Subjects thought the induction process needed much revamping to meet its goals. The induction program is, in theory, supposed to help ease the transition from college or the business world to the classroom but, instead, it increases the level of tension and stress at the beginning of the teacher's career. All respondents expressed some frustration, and even confusion, about certain expectations that did not match between building and district, or that were not clearly spelled out to them.

The researcher recommended that the district improve its communication between district and buildings through several steps, that it should implement a more specific and useful mentor program, and that it should work to tailor the induction process to the needs of a varied group of teachers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are easier subjects to tackle than one as subjective as new teachers' perception of a program aimed at them. However, teacher training in the early years, combined with the loss of an undervalued and priceless resource in education--those bright young minds that enter our profession and who leave just as they are entering their most productive years-- is a problem that I have been interested in for much of my career. I could not see myself investing such a significant amount of time in something that I was not as passionate about as this topic. This process has now lasted the better part of five years. I floundered finding a specific question on which to pinpoint my research. Without the help of several people, I would never have made it this far. It is those people, who helped me through this process in their own way, who I would like to thank.

First, my committee members need to be acknowledged. Dr. Marc Mahlios, my advisor through the last three years of this process, has tactfully and with keen sensitivity pointed out to me the shortcomings in my logic, my writing, and my approach when needed. He has acted as cheerleader and coach, mentor and much needed conscience throughout the process. I'm sure there have been much better advisees with whom he has worked, but there could have been no better advisor than he.

Dr. Jennifer Ng worked with me on the urban aspects of my research, and her work on similar subjects is cited in this research. She has been invaluable as a member of my committee.

Dr. Susan Twombly, Dr. Howard Ebmeier, and Dr. Bruce Frey have all lent advice and listened when I needed to vent. They helped guide me to an acceptable proposal and told me frankly where they thought I would encounter frustration and difficulty. They were right. I didn't miss some of the potholes in the road, but knowing they would be there made it less painful when I hit them.

Julie Banhart was both a godsend and the driver I needed to get me through the finish line as I neared the end of this process. Without her help with the maze that can be APA formatting, along with her good ear for language, I might not have made it through as easily as I did.

I would like to thank my mother and father for raising me never to quit. Too often to count, I was ready to throw in the towel, but their words kept ringing in my ears. "Son, when you start something, you finish it."

My wife Stacy and my two sons, Braedan and Kellen, have kept me sane. My wife is an angel and my best friend. I have her to thank for keeping me focused on the finish. Both boys were added to our family after the start of this journey. Some of my colleagues say families are a distraction to serious practitioner research. We have jobs to do all day and our families can take us away from our "night job" sometimes. I, however, would not have made it through this without them. They are my light and life, and it is for them that I wanted to leave something lasting.

To my colleagues who sat for the interviews that provide the insights gained in this study, and for the administration of Triangle Hills School District, I am eternally

grateful. They have been supportive and genuinely interested in my findings, however delayed they might be from our original timeline.

This is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Emogene McLain. She wanted to be a teacher, but because of the Great Depression and its effects on her family, she was unable to complete college. Instead, she made a home with my grandfather and guided her two children and three of her four grandchildren into education. She didn't live to see the anticipated completion of this project, but the last time she spoke to me she made me promise to finish.

Finally, to all those who are entering the noble profession of teaching, I wish you the best of luck, and I hope that you find your place and persevere, because you are needed more than you could ever know.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction and Rationale

Nationally, education is facing a crisis. About a third of new teachers do not stay in the profession past the three year mark. Half leave before five years are complete. In urban districts, the attrition rate is over half (Prince, 2002; Sachs 2004).

One may ask why this is important. Urban districts face considerable hurdles in reaching students on a daily basis. Among these hurdles, including poverty, transience, lack of consistent adult presence in the home, and the influence of drugs and alcohol, the consistent presence of teachers in the school is the one thing that can be controlled. It also has added importance because teachers may be the only consistent presences in some students' lives (Louis and Kruse, 1995).

Studies across America in the last ten years have shown that highly qualified, effective teachers who are consistently in contact with low-socio-economic students make those students achieve better on standardized performance instruments (Viadero, 2005). The first three to five years of a teacher's career are critical in the development of effective teachers (Briton, Ganser and Wong, 2005). Writing for the National Commission on Teaching and America's future, Hammond saw a correlation between attrition rates and student achievement. The attrition rate in our nation's schools, especially those in urban areas, indicates a decreased opportunity for urban students to

experience an effective teacher (Hammond, 2002). What factors help urban schools retain qualified early career educators? The American public education system has dealt with the issue of staffing its urban schools and avoiding troublesome turnover for more than two generations. The situation has intensified due to the nationwide teacher shortage and the impending departure of the baby boomer generation from the workforce in general and education in particular, where many of the leading edge (those born in the immediate post World War II years) are already retired. A problem that used to be relegated to inner-city school districts now is a problem for almost everyone, which has added to the problem in the most hard-to-staff districts. Add to this the fact that national studies now have shown that the public perceives teachers to be grossly underpaid for the job they perform, and one can see the trouble schools might have staffing and keeping good teachers (Berry, 2004). Americans' perceptions of urban schools have for some time been rather negative. They are seen as places that are full of poor teachers, poor students, and myriad other problems that people do not want to face. In addition, the definition of *urban schools* has had to be expanded as minority populations have migrated outward into the older, inner-ring suburbs of large and medium sized cities across the country (Costigan, 2005). There are now more school districts that face "urban" challenges, and more school districts that are facing the dilemma of how to retain teachers while demanding high quality and uniformity in the face of mandates made by No Child Left Behind. These issues have only added to the loss of teachers in higher poverty and higher minority school district. In short, the nation will be faced with the replacement of over 1.7 million teachers by 2012, a

situation heretofore not faced by domestic public education institutions (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2002)

This statistic is daunting enough. However, the case is compounded by the fact that the problems that face urban districts are even more dire than those that are faced by other districts. Teacher attrition is high nationwide, as the above information attests. However, attrition in urban districts is even higher, with teachers often using these districts as training grounds and leaving in a few years for what they perceive to be easier jobs. The 50% attrition rate among early career (first to fifth year) teachers in urban districts shows just how hard it is to find continuity in urban schools (Berry, 2004). Studies, such as the excellent one completed by Darling-Hammond for the *Journal of Teacher Education* in 2000, often do not combine educational outcomes with teacher attrition; Darling-Hammond's study and others read for background for this dissertation, focus on teacher preparation and student success. Teacher attrition is considered a separate issue. This seems to leave a need for more studies of schools in the urban setting to find out what is happening to teachers who are being recruited to fill the needs discussed above. Specifically, studies need to be conducted to help answer the question of why teachers decide to stay or leave urban schools and how effective specific urban districts are in combating the attrition that has cost them consistency and continuity in implementing and perpetuating programs and initiatives. More specifically, the question needs to be answered as to how new teachers are trained or inducted into urban education systems and if this induction process influences teachers to stay longer than previous approaches.

While things such as work environment, identification with students and parents, sense of community with other teachers, and administrative leadership have come into play in attempting to plumb the reasons why teachers decide to stay or leave the urban setting, some researchers and a few school districts like Philadelphia have begun to look at university teacher preparation programs and district induction programs for new teachers as key to preparing teachers for the urban setting and involving them in the school community as well as employed in the profession in the key early years of teaching (Bradley & Loadman, 2005). This is especially important in urban schools, due to their need for prepared teachers to walk into the classroom and their constant battles with keeping good teachers instead of losing them to other school districts.

One major problem for schools trying to figure out the puzzle of teacher induction and retention is how teachers perceive being asked to mold themselves into what the district they enter wants from a new teacher while often being asked to act as change agents for struggling schools (Beach and Pearson, 1998). Tickle (2000) addressed the conundrum of teacher induction in two different studies, addressing teacher induction as “an unsolved problem.” Not the least of the problems Tickle points out is that newly qualified teachers are asked to enter into “old practices, traditions, and circumstances in which behaviors are prescribed and performances assessed while expecting and being expected to participate as reformers in search of solutions to endemic institutional problems” (p.7). The frustration for many new teachers is

understandable. Though the research here is almost a decade old, it illustrates a problem that still begs a solution.

As the challenges our nation's schools face have become more apparent, the realization has spawned many studies on how educators are prepared for the classroom, and a change in the way classroom teachers are prepared to enter their first day as "real" teachers. According to recent studies done by several researchers, including Ayalon (2004), observation time at most major universities can now reach the 70-80 hour range, and student teaching in many university programs is approaching a complete semester. While few can question that our universities are attempting to prepare students for the realities of teaching, there is still a disconnect between what is being done at our universities and what schools do with new teachers. Britton, Ganser and Wong (2005) defined teacher induction as a highly organized and comprehensive form of staff development, involving many people and components, which typically continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher's career. Mentoring is often a component of the induction process. However, in Britton, Ganser and Wong's study of five countries' approach to induction, again and again it is stressed that the kind of mentors chosen for new teachers is vital to the relative success of the program as measured by teacher retention and the satisfaction teachers report in their first years of teaching. Britton et al. also reported that Switzerland, New Zealand, Japan, France, and even China spend more time preparing and expect more professionalism from their teachers than does the United States. In these countries, teachers are not only are revered, but they work with a spirit of collaboration and

openness that is fostered by their school systems. Much money and time is spent for training outside the classroom. Young teachers assume a lesser teaching burden early in their career so that they may learn from experienced teachers. Britton et al. go on to make the comparison that, in the United States, studies have seen little to no positive effect from mentor programs in schools that spend as little as *\$65 a year per teacher* on teacher induction. Therefore, it seems prudent to this researcher to study the real-life experience of a group of teachers who are currently in the early years of employment in an urban setting to better understand how school supports contribute, if at all, to their retention.

Another aspect that must be considered is the influx of alternatively certified teachers into the urban setting, often fueled by the urgent need of urban districts to fill high need areas such as math and science. This has made it imperative for districts to give much more in-depth training in basic teaching techniques to their new teachers, assuming many of them do not possess traditional university school of education backgrounds. This is an issue that should not be taken lightly. Teachers are entering classrooms with a bare minimum of preparation. Should their induction process be the same as that of teachers entering with a full college or university education program successfully behind them (Gonzalez, Gellert, Henry, Fleshman, and Meagher, 2008)?

Induction programs in all types of school districts differ substantially. However, it is especially apparent in the urban setting, where mistakes or missteps in training young teachers may mean losing yet another valuable asset. Despite the need to retain as many good teachers as possible, much more care seems to be given by

districts to introducing policies and procedures of the school to new teachers while basically ignoring the real-life nuts and bolts issues that teachers might have before entering the classroom (Costigan, 2005).

The need for further study regarding teacher induction techniques and their effect on teacher satisfaction and attrition is becoming more apparent. Nationally, almost 10% of new teachers leave before their first year is even completed. Almost half of all new teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Greiner & Smith, 2006). Add to that the fact that many teachers see urban education as a training ground or a means to get student loans paid off (treating it, in effect, as a stint in the Peace Corps or another “good act”) and one can see the daunting task of retaining teachers in the urban school setting. Questions urban districts must ask include “What exactly are we doing with our new teachers? How do our young educators perceive our induction process? And finally, what should school districts do to make the process bear more fruit in the form of teachers who decide to stay in the same districts for many years?”

Many school districts have, in the last decade, revamped the way they approach teacher induction. Recognizing, at long last, the inherent partnerships that could exist for them, schools have begun to actively recruit those who student teach in their buildings, and urban universities have begun to place emphasis on training students to be ready for the challenges of urban settings (Waddell, 2005). Some districts have gone so far as to actively recruit students while they are still in high school to attend urban universities and come back to teach in the high school from which they graduated. However, the literature that exists studying these partnerships is limited, and the

challenges of keeping a school-university partnership operating at a healthy level are so daunting that more study of the subject seems appropriate to gauge the success of such programs.

Once the new teacher enters the school, the question remains of how districts go about ensuring their transition is as easy as possible. New teachers are overwhelmed with the day-to-day realities of the job itself and its enormous responsibilities, and are also faced with the many meetings required of new teachers. Portfolios, mentor meetings, observations, all of which are designed to help teachers understand the needs of the district and the profession, pile up to make a seemingly impossible mountain to climb for a new educator. The young instructor often cannot see the value in the induction because the activities often are not explained well or tied to real job needs of teachers (Waddell 2005). The very real threats made by No Child Left Behind and by state and local mandates backing federal laws, in tandem with low pay and little recognition, make it easy to see why teachers leave for suburban districts, or leave the profession altogether. As one young teacher said when discussing this study, "I hope you tell them that we need more about how to survive and less about how to fill out a requisition for a stapler." As humorous as this comment might have been intended, it reinforces the disconnect some school districts have with what their new teachers want and need, and what they provide those new teachers upon entry into their district.

Many studies have been conducted in recent years looking into ways that colleges of education can better prepare pre-service teachers for the field. Some of the

traits that these colleges have identified in teachers who leave the field in their first five years include:

1. A lack of understanding of the larger social context of education—i.e., the reasons why education is so much of a “hot button” topic.
2. No supervised experience in a high-needs environment
3. Little or no reflective inquiry process that is facilitated by someone trained in this specific area.

Some colleges have made concerted efforts to address these issues, and in doing so have helped pre-service teachers in urban areas to better understand the field they are entering and the places in which they decide to teach. Yet, it seems more needs to be done to help *new* teachers assimilate, adjust, and grow into the positions they secure (Couvier, Brandon, & Prasow, 2008). Too often, the hectic schedule of the school year leads the school district to frontload all meetings and induction procedures into a three- to four-day marathon, then throw the new teacher to the wolves on the first day of school. In the Winter 2009 *Journal of Staff Development*, Wiebke and Bardin illustrate that even now early career staff development can range from an informal buddy system with just a few meetings before school starts, to the full “comprehensive induction” including meetings, structured mentoring, portfolio building, common plan time, and standards based evaluation to give a more true determination of whether teachers are progressing successfully. While many districts are trying to be there to guide the young teacher through the first years of the profession, there seems, too often, to be a difference in the way these programs are perceived by those who design and run them

and the teachers who are being subjected to them. This is an important area that seems to merit further study.

Hoping to retain as many new teachers as possible, the Kansas City Missouri School District, along with the satellite school districts of the inner-ring suburban areas of Kansas City (Hickman Mills C-1, Center, and Park Hill), have worked since the fall of 2005 with the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Institute for Urban Education to recruit, train, and keep good young teachers in the urban setting. While this program employs many of the above-mentioned strategies, such as mentoring, ongoing professional development, and real-world pre-teaching experiences, the school districts and the university also have begun to work on follow-through activities to *keep* the young teachers in touch with the reasons why they entered the profession and to continue their education beyond the university setting. While other universities, such as UCLA, Temple, and Rutgers, have implemented similar programs, UMKC has added much more to theirs—increasing the school's commitment to enrolling as many as 140 prospective teachers in the program at one time; most of them from the urban core themselves. This addresses the stated problem of students in inner city and urban schools who go years without seeing teachers who resemble them, especially racially. The results of this initiative are still unclear, but the steps UMKC and its partner school districts have taken once they have recruited and hired new teachers merit further study. (Waddell, 2005).

## Purpose of the Study

In this study, the researcher explored the perceived effect, in terms of performance in the classroom, readiness to teach, and relationship with the district, of the new teacher induction process on teachers who have stayed or left the urban district in question through first-hand accounts of early service educators.

## Defining Question/Background to the Study

While there are many areas within the purview of teacher induction that could be studied, the questions this research project addressed are:

1. How did the new teacher induction program shape teacher growth according to those who participated in it?

Sub Questions: How did the induction program shape teachers in these areas: pedagogical, cultural, personal level of comfort in the profession and district?

2. What differences exist between those who left the district and those who stayed?

Within the scope of these questions the researcher pursued reasons how elements of the program worked and did not work, as well as other factors in the overall work environment that may have helped or interfered with new teachers' ability to succeed in the district.

Often, teachers use urban districts as training grounds, knowing that the perception is that, if they can survive there, they have the tools to thrive in the suburban

schools that provide an “easier” working environment. Somehow, this bleeding must be stopped, and thus the need to see what the subject district is doing to keep its young teachers.

### Problem Statement

Many of the studies that have been done regarding urban teacher induction programs and their effect on teacher retention have been equivocal about the degree to which such programs influence teachers to stay in their schools. As mentioned above, programs in many large inner city districts have, in the past, focused on other routes to teacher retention, including bonuses and loan forgiveness. Those that use developmental induction programs use widely varying models. While 80% of school districts in recent studies have professed to some kind of induction program, not all are designed the same, and the one studied in this case is quite ambitious. Taking into account the recognition that some urban universities have received in the past decade for trying “innovative” methods to prepare teachers for the classroom, and the fact that a large percentage of school districts, both urban and otherwise, have now put into place mentoring, portfolio building, discussion groups and classes to help battle attrition in their schools, a model is beginning to emerge that has been accepted in education circles as an effective way for schools to induct teachers. This model has been studied, but there are not many definitive case studies that can report the effect of a specific induction program on an urban teacher group through first-hand accounts.

### Significance of the Study

Focusing on the way the induction program works according to its participants, this researcher wished to add to the knowledge base regarding comprehensive induction and mentoring programs in urban schools.

By adding to the overall knowledge base regarding comprehensive induction programs and their perceived effect on teacher retention, the researcher hopes that urban districts can make educated decisions regarding the way in which they induct new teachers. That there is a tie between continuity of staff and school success is undoubted, and this remains a major problem for urban schools. This researcher would like to help in some small way to remedy this situation.

### Researcher's Perspective

It was this researcher's expectation that most teachers who were interviewed for this project would voice some concern as to the overall positive effect of the induction program on their first years in the classroom. Areas of concern were expected to be in the real-world connection of their training, the time commitment and availability of mentor teachers and administrators assigned to assist them, the time given to them by the district to address the daily grind of teaching, and the lack of positive feedback given to new teachers, to give them a reason to wish to stay. These perceptions are drawn directly from eighteen years of public school service in varied settings and in various school positions, from classroom teacher to program coordinator to administrator.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The following literature review examines the relationship between the approach of urban public school systems to new teacher induction and their retention of early career educators. Using the research questions to be explored, this chapter serves as a baseline of knowledge regarding the use of different induction strategies, from recruitment through retention of young veteran teachers in the urban setting. The chapter highlights problems that have existed for quite some time in urban teacher retention and explores different metropolitan school systems, not only in the United States but worldwide, describing what induction processes they have used and what levels of success they have experienced. Many of the leading researchers in education have touched on this subject. While this is by no means an exhaustive account, there is much to be learned from their findings.

Nothing could highlight the need for good teachers who wish to stay and provide some degree of stability in the urban setting more than a quote from Ng's (2003) article on teacher shortages in the urban environment:

The Great City School Districts, representing many of the largest urban schools in the United States, satisfied their need to staff classrooms with a variety of means. According to the report, 'sixty percent of responding districts allow individuals to teach under emergency permits, 60% use long term substitutes, 37.5% hire teachers with certification waivers, and 35% of districts recognize internship programs or permits (p. 381).

Ng (2003) quotes 1998 poll data supporting the public's perception of improving quality teaching as the highest priority in improving student performance in

urban districts. This belief is belied by the lack of monetary support that is given to districts by state funding formulas that penalize urban districts that perform poorly on standardized tests. However, it speaks to the importance of finding out what makes quality urban educators, or any younger teacher, stay on the job in the current climate. There is an obvious gap between the stated need for quality teachers and the fact that a large percentage of teachers who lack basic certification are being hired into the classroom.

These highly qualified teachers must be a calming influence on what has become a tumultuous area of society. Ng (2005) stated the importance of finding equality for all citizens in our country, and the importance of white society recognizing their complicity in allowing inequality in education and other parts of society to become so obvious. One key step in this process would seem to be recruiting and keeping good teachers in the urban setting.

Large urban districts such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Boston have had to deal with this issue for decades. Decaying inner-city districts, such as St. Louis and Detroit, have experienced declines in teacher tenure as well. Neild and Useem (2005) studied a three-year project aimed at producing better teacher retention in the Philadelphia public schools. At the time, the district was facing a partial takeover mandated by the state, in which private contractors were assuming control of 44 of the district's worst performing schools. Facing these circumstances, the district, in desperation, reached out to its business partners to help devise models for how to better recruit and induct teachers. At the time, only 73% of first-year teachers even *finished*

their initial year in the district. Even after implementing radical changes in the way teachers were brought into the district and trained during their early service time, just 91% of first year teachers remained through their entire first year (Neild and Useem, 2005). While this is an improvement, it still begs the question of how urban districts can find recruits who fit the needed profile of those who are willing to, and will most likely, stay in the district to provide stability where it is needed and, having found them, induct these teachers in a way that causes them to wish to stay past their first few years in the classroom.

In the Philadelphia study, the district CEO, brought in to coordinate the outside efforts to improve many of the low-performing schools in the district, encouraged thinking outside the box in recruiting, training, and trying to retain teachers. Facing a deadline of 2006 for having all teachers in the district fit the definition of “highly qualified,” the district CEO Paul Valla saw what looked like an impossible task. Less than half of teachers hired by the district stayed on the job three years. Many positions were staffed with people under emergency certificates or without certification at all. The district implemented a multi-pronged approach to meet the goal (Neild and Useem, 2005). Vallas implemented the following strategies:

1. The district recruited heavily from among students who lived in the area, marketing through billboards, radio, and a revamped website.
2. The district began to offer signing bonuses of \$4500 to new hires, with teachers getting the whole amount if they stayed three years.

3. Making some respected teachers into “teacher ambassadors,” giving them time off to recruit at job fairs and colleges.
4. Reimbursing for the praxis exam for anyone who wished to become certified in high-needs areas (including elementary teachers who wished to obtain middle school certification).

Six alternative certification programs, including teacher apprenticeships for inexperienced candidates, were designed to cut down on the failure rate among incoming young teachers. The district worked with the universities in the area, including Temple, to identify candidates that might fit the district’s needs. (Neild and Useem, 2005).

Studies as early as 1988 lauded the successes of school-university partnerships in helping new teachers in urban environments to stay connected to the school. Articles such as these made clear the usefulness of recruiting students early as pre-service teachers (even extending to Future Teacher clubs in high school) and training them in what schools feel is necessary to be successful in their environment. Recruiting students back to their high school to teach was one goal of such projects (Case, Shive, Ingebretson, & Spiegel 1988).

Buckley, Schneider and Shang (2005) addressed the importance of figuring out what is wrong with the education profession that causes teachers to leave at such a high rate. Among the factors given in the article were the following:

1. Low pay
2. Idealism (the craft does not meet the idealist’s vision of teaching)

3. Quality of pre-service preparation
4. Lack of administrative support
5. Constant pressure and threats from federal, state, and local mandates especially No Child Left Behind
6. Poor student behavior
7. Working conditions such as buildings and grounds and cleanliness of facilities
8. Budgetary issues such as using own money to buy classroom supplies

Bradley and Loadman (2005) addressed the fact that there is a major teacher shortage in urban and rural schools. Boles and Troen (2005) stated, “Too often, teaching is described as a dead-end job with low status, uncompetitive salaries, and poor working conditions” (p. 6). Add to this the prospect of working with students who struggle to meet basic state standards, and the idea that, as a teacher, one may be judged on one’s students’ performance on those standards, and the recipe for constant turnover is in place.

The truth of the matter is teachers are asked to do, on a daily basis, what almost no one in a business setting would be able to do. They educate, on average, 125 students a day, have less than five hours of preparation time a week, and have little time to truly collaborate with their peers over common assessments, classroom drill and practice, or objectives (Bradley and Loadman, 2005).

In the five-country study reported on by Britton et al. (2005), each country’s method of induction (most have a national model) was detailed, but what also struck home in reading the report was the way in which teachers were viewed in each country.

In Switzerland “teachers are assumed to be lifetime learners.” In Shanghai, teachers learn early “to engage in joint work to support their teaching and personal learning.” In Japan, “teaching is regarded as a high-status occupation, a dignified profession.” In addition, all these countries consider young teachers to still be developing as professionals. In France, the novice has to pass highly rigorous exams, both oral and written, to teach at the secondary level. Even then, they are considered to be *stagiaire*—someone who is undertaking a stage of development. Each new teacher, while teaching, must continue to take specific teacher education courses where they discuss and critique each other’s work with the guidance of a veteran teacher. This does not compare favorably with the way we induct teachers in America.

The aforementioned factors regarding the lack of a coherent approach to training in America all relate to the issue of teacher retention in that they work to drive teachers out of the classroom. Studies have found that men, especially, who are graduate degreed and meet the standard of “highly qualified” stated in NCLB legislation are capable of out-earning their teacher pay by almost double in a move to the private sector (Buckley et al., 2005). This alone causes many to shun the profession before they enter it.

It would seem that the profession finds itself in a dire circumstance at this point. However, there is something that education possesses that most other professions do not. Public Agenda (2000) found in a blind survey that 86% of new teachers (1-3 years of service) saw themselves as “destined” to teach. This belief that teaching is a “calling” makes recruiting to a seemingly impossible position possible. However, the

task of keeping teachers interested in the face of the realities of the position is still a problem to be addressed. The drop-off from idealistic new teacher to disillusioned third year teacher to exiting the profession is as precipitous as it is real. The question then becomes, *how does a district keep its qualified young teachers not only connected to the profession but to the district into which they were hired?*

Berry (2006) writes that it has been three-quarters of a century since William Waller wrote about the lack of support for America's teachers during their formative years. He decries the fact that little has been done to universally address the issue—that like most of our education policies, we have, to our detriment, relied on the local level. This has led to a hodge-podge of under-funded induction programs. Most are not monitored for quality, and most give results one would expect from such programs.

Addressing these issues is difficult to impossible for some school districts in today's climate. Other writers, however, see the issue as more easily addressed. Working conditions, pre-service preparation, and perceived lack of support can all be improved without districts having to allocate much more of their budget to teacher issues. Brown (2003) cites the use of mentoring programs as cutting the attrition rate for new teachers by up to half. These mentoring programs, Brown goes on to say, have been hijacked recently by federal accountability standards but, when run properly, they focus on real-life classroom experiences, mentoring programs from veteran to new teachers, and shared dialogue between these groups to help everyone better understand best practice. Having an outlet like this helps to reassure teachers they are not the only ones experiencing certain “problems” and that these issues can be overcome. In other

words, new teachers are not operating in a vacuum, nor are they operating under the gun of perceived threats if they don't meet certain standards.

Survey results of "Generation Y" teachers (defined for this study as those born between 1978 and 1986) published in *American Teacher* (2008) show that this generation of instructors realizes that pay is not the biggest issue they face when entering the profession. When they list their biggest wishes, the most important things to them are more and better training to be innovative and flexible in the classroom, more supportive administrators, and more time to complete their job well.

Tillman, (2003), in a qualitative study of a mentoring triad published in *Theory into Practice*, finds that mentoring programs connecting early service teachers to more veteran educators can positively affect the chances of teachers not only being competent and staying in the profession, but also of staying in the school in which they teach.

Other studies support the notion that mentoring programs should be an integral part of teacher induction and should even be considered a part of pre-service teaching, up to and including a teacher's first year in the classroom (Thompson & Grossman, 2004). In their findings, the authors state that not only does the program they studied help to qualify teachers for service, but also helps in recruiting and retaining teachers as well. This would seem to agree with the results of the aforementioned study in Philadelphia during the same time frame.

Of course, not all researchers agree that this is the case. Teacher costs are already a very high portion of any district's budget, and budgeting more to give time to

mentoring programs, hours off for induction and mentor level teachers, and dealing with the added stress of scheduling more students into available sections is prohibitive to some. Bradley and Loadman (2005) state that the main reasons teachers stay in the school system, especially large urban school systems, is “intrinsic.” This would seem to be obvious, since the teachers who have decided to stay have done so in spite of the fact that many of the things the above studies recommend are not happening in many districts.

However, it would be a mistake to think that teachers can, as a whole, find the “inner strength” to stay on in a situation that appears to be getting more difficult year after year. There are many examples that show that lack of induction or adequate preparation can sink a career before it begins. Berry (2006) discusses the trials of teachers who enter the profession with little or no training. These alternatively certificated teachers often have no idea what their first days or months on the job will look like and are left practically defenseless in attempting to gain control of their classroom. In his profile of Elias Walsh, a teacher in the Teach for America program, a program that forgives student loans in exchange for two years of service in high poverty areas, Berry shows the very real danger of unprepared teachers taking over full-time teaching positions in challenging areas. The teacher had no idea how to address situations in which only a quarter of his students were present on a given day, or in which all of his students were “out of control.” His experience could be summed up in one response to a question from the interviewer. “There have been so many bad days...I feel so hurt and tired I don’t want to come back the next morning.”(Berry,

2006, p. 34). Can we truly expect to improve teacher retention when our main way of recruiting them is to find college graduates and promise to pay their loans off for just two years' service?

Berry (2006) concludes that to fix this problem, more has to be done to listen both to the voices of our young teachers and to the expert teachers who struggle to find time and resources with which to mentor them. The idea that a teacher can be formed from a cookie cutter mold—that they can robotically deliver a good lesson and get results from students—is far from correct. Despite the cost, the public, according to statistics quoted by Berry, believes in a quality education for their children, even if it means higher taxes. However, the process has become so politically charged this information rarely gets out.

Cost alone, taking into account that schools are funded by tax money, often keeps districts from implementing as much teacher training as they might in a perfect setting. The Philadelphia case again makes a good example. Neild and Useem (2005) twice mention the exorbitant cost of continuing the program, estimating that the teacher internship program alone costs \$93,000 per participant over a two year period.

Still other studies of young urban educators have sought to re-envision the role of the urban educator to facilitate retention. Seeing that many universities struggle to create the kind of experience that pre-service teachers will see in the field, Corcoran, Walker and White (1988) conducted a survey of over 400 urban teachers in their second to sixth years of teaching in Detroit Public Schools. What they found was that urban teachers are more likely to stay if given a real-life pre-service assignment, and

that more teachers would stay in the profession if their experience in their first years of teaching concentrated on giving them the background knowledge to realize that their job extends far beyond the classroom to a variety of professional roles. This would seem to support the notion that most pre-service teachers hope for an assignment in student teaching and even in their observation hours that is much the same as they might encounter in their first full-time teaching assignment. Getting to know the lay of the land before one enters the real world of teaching would appear to be of service not only to the teacher but also to the district in which the teacher is placed. The district would get to evaluate the pre-service teacher based on his/her performance in an area similar to the one in which he/she would be working, and if they hired this teacher, to know to what areas of strength and weakness the early service professional training should be tailored. This has led several districts to offer tuition reimbursement and signing bonuses to student teachers they recruit who then decide to come to work in the same district.

Some have sought to connect specific personality attributes and teaching styles to effectiveness in the urban environment. However, recent studies have shown little correlation between personality and success in urban schools (Sachs, 2004). It seems there is much more connection between the way teachers are prepared to teach and their effectiveness than there is in the innate personality aspects of the urban teacher. The Sachs and Kay study used a set of defined factors gleaned from questionnaires, then used the responses to see if they could classify teachers as ones who would be successful in the urban environment. Even though their findings did not verify some

previous research that had hinted at a correlation between personality and teacher success in urban schools, this idea continues to persist in some circles. This is not to minimize the importance of building relationships with students, especially in urban settings, as a key to teacher success. However, it does downplay the idea that one has to have shared experiences with their students, or look like their students, to be successful.

Teacher retention is important due to several factors, the most important being that teachers, according to most recent studies, are the lynch pin to student success (Berry, 2004). No other factor should approach this one when schools decide how to allocate precious funds.

To underscore the importance of urban teacher induction as a means for retention, Hunter (2003) an effort in a large urban school district to curb teacher attrition through what was considered “non-traditional” methods. Hunter describes a program that specifically tailors itself to individual teacher needs as pre-service and new teachers are inducted into the culture of the school district and encouraged to put their stamp on the *product*, the students they teach. Such programs, while becoming more common in the past four years, have still not become the norm, and they widely vary even within the same metro areas.

While these seem like new issues to many teachers who began their careers in the 1990s or later, those with a longer history might remember that mentoring programs were in vogue in the 1980s, and have waxed and waned with the rising and sinking of education funding and the rise of accountability as the main focus of

education. Those programs that are flourishing now, however, seem to be the ones that focus on reflective practice, and give mature teachers the chance to connect with young colleagues in a meaningful way (Brown, 2003).

One way urban centers have long tried to lure teachers to stay with them is by offering cash incentives in the form of loan forgiveness or sign-on bonuses to teachers willing to teach for a period of time in the urban center. The logic behind these programs is that if someone comes, and if the incentive is large enough, they may stay long enough to learn to love it. Large cities such, as Boston, Baltimore, Washington D.C., and more recently, Philadelphia have, in the past several years, implemented programs that include signing bonuses and retention bonuses to teachers willing to work in an urban setting. In the early 1990s, Baltimore introduced a program that was innovative for the time. The program used a multi-pronged approach to teacher retention focusing on recruitment, induction, mentoring, and use of continuing professional portfolios to keep teachers connected to the school (Tillman, 2003). However, there has been mixed success in these programs. The signing bonus program has shown little to no success at keeping teachers after their allotted time is up; this seems to support the idea that teachers must be recruited with more in mind than a one-time financial incentive. The system in place in Baltimore has its share of issues, such as a perception among some teachers that the professional portfolios have been evaluated punitively by administrators unhappy with them over other things. Still, the Baltimore system seems to have more positive aspects, such as mentoring and portfolio building, that would influence teachers to more readily form an emotional and

psychological bond to the school than the simple application of a bonus, and in the study this system was considered by the authors a qualified success.

Berry (2004) states that the problem of teacher retention has far surpassed that of recruitment and preparation as the nation's number one educational obstacle. The problem is worst in hard-to-staff schools—those serving urban poor or rural poor students. In Berry's view, even though far more than the 100,000 new teachers actually needed are produced by universities and alternative certification programs annually, the profession remains highly localized, with teachers preferring to teach near where they grew up or near where they went to college. In addition, hard-to-staff schools see more alternative certifications and fewer teachers who are willing to stay. Up to 50% attrition within five years leaves students facing a revolving door of untried teachers throughout their career. Combine this with the fact that many high-poverty students are from one-parent families and have less pre-school training, and there is little wonder that there exists an achievement gap in our country.

As stated previously, an important reason to study teacher induction is that so many alternatively certificated people are entering the profession. No Child Left Behind does not stress a teaching degree as a measure of a highly qualified candidate. The law defines a highly qualified individual as someone who has high verbal ability and some understanding of the subject matter. It would seem that these "highly qualified" individuals might be less likely to be successful in unstructured programs of induction to teaching than would someone with a more formal education background (Berry, 2004).

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding urban school districts' attempts to better prepare early career educators for success and their work to keep continuity in their teaching staffs. One way that schools have tried to retain teachers is by using multi-faceted induction programs, employing such things as mentor teacher meetings, strategic planning sessions for first and second year teachers, portfolios, or combinations of these things. Another has been by offering large cash incentives in the form of loan forgiveness or signing bonuses. Still another has been school/university partnerships in areas where these are easily formed. Some districts have tried combinations of the aforementioned solutions. The induction programs have seen some success in keeping teachers connected in their early career, as have the school/university partnerships in identifying pre-service teachers who fit the mold of the successful urban educator. However, the incentive programs have shown little return on their investment. The literature seems to need the addition of some specific case studies of programs that are working within the most logical path to success, combining a school/university partnership and more traditional induction process to mold teachers who fit the vision of the district.

In addition, the literature identifies major problems that teachers in past studies have perceived in their districts. One problem was caused by the fact that new teachers are often brought into urban districts as change agents, but are asked immediately to conform to a strict code of teaching set forth by the district they have been brought in to help change. This is something of a catch-22. Another perceived problem among

teachers studied was that of alternatively certificated teachers trying to get up to speed on best practice while learning how to be a master teacher at the same time.

The need exists for a qualitative study of working early career teachers who have entered into and worked at least one year in an urban teacher induction program. The need also exists to better understand their perceptions of such a program and its effect on their day-to-day teaching experiences and, most importantly, their decision to remain in education.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Research Questions

1. How did the new teacher induction program shape teacher growth according to those who participated in it?

Sub Questions: How did the induction program shape teachers in these areas: pedagogical, cultural, personal level of comfort in the profession and district?

2. What differences exist between those who left the district and those who stayed in the way they answer the questions posed to them by the interviewer?

#### Study Design and Participants

##### *Study District*

Triangle Hills School District, an urban school district on the border of a medium-sized Midwestern city and its inner-ring suburbs, has experienced much change in its history. The district's promotional materials sum it up best:

The district began its life as a working mill serving farmers in the region in the 1800's. The area's tie with western expansion can be seen by the number of streets and schools that have been named after the westward trails that once ran through the district...President Harry S. Truman served on the board of education early in the district's life...The community was an early suburban area 50 years ago. Following the floods of 1951, tract houses began to spring up in the area, causing the district to grow rapidly...the tornado of 1957, despite wiping out much of the surrounding neighborhood and the district's only high school, did little to slow the growth. The district peaked in the late 1970's with three middle schools and two high schools, and a total student population of over 11,000 students....in the last thirty years,

more families have moved from the city's core to the community. This led to some flight from the area, and by the early 1990's only 6800 students remained in the district...since then the district has stabilized, though the problems of transience, high poverty and low business output in the area continue to be challenges. There is hope that the revitalization of the area around the closed-down local mall will bring new hope and new monies to the school district.

At this point, the district is considered urban. By way of definition, this researcher offers the guidelines followed when placing pre-service teachers in the field for their "urban" experience by the State Universities of New York:

1. The school has a relatively high rate of poverty (as measured by Free and Reduced Lunch data)
2. The school has a relatively high proportion of students of color
3. The school has a relatively high proportion of students who are Limited English Proficient.
4. The school has been designated as "High Need"

While not all schools will meet all four criteria, if a school meets two or more they very well could be considered an urban school. (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

The Triangle Hills School District suffers from the urban problem of teacher turnover and difficulty recruiting new teachers, especially in need areas such as math. The district hires approximately 100 new teachers each year and has averaged this for the last ten years. Almost half the teachers who are hired by the district each year leave before their fifth year in the district. This statistic has not changed, although the percentage of people staying more than two years has increased, according to the district's human resources department.

### *Study Design*

The design chosen for this study was a qualitative inquiry research project. The study was an effort to examine certain aspects of a school's teacher induction system using qualitative methods. This researcher chose to use qualitative inquiry due to the nature of the research questions presented. The questions asked were not easily measured quantifiably. The researcher asked for the *stories* of early career teachers and assessed the relative views and observances of these instructors regarding their experiences with a specific induction program. It seemed that directly questioning the new teachers and their beliefs and feelings about an induction program would further the understanding of where urban schools are succeeding or possibly failing our young teachers in the eyes of an extremely important audience, namely the teachers themselves. In addition, insight was gleaned as to why those who chose to remain did so, and what can be done to solidify the core staff in our urban schools through better on-the-job preparation and support. In short, urban schools lose far too many teachers, whether because the schools are perceived as training grounds or because of a feeling of failure on the part of the young teachers who leave the district. The researcher hoped to find answers in the responses of the subjects who chose to stay as to what elements of the induction program and what view of the profession influenced them to remain in their current position.

The sample was chosen using the employment rolls of a large urban district in the inner ring of suburban development around a medium-sized Midwestern city. The Human Resources department provided the researcher with the employment rolls for

the district's teachers with five or less years of experience. From that roll, the researcher selected close to an equal number of participants from each of the four secondary buildings in the district. Twenty-two subjects were approached about interviewing. The researcher scheduled and followed through with interviews, and when twenty interviews were completed, the other two subjects (both white men) were notified that they would not be needed. The subjects fell into the following categories: There were 13 men and 7 women. Twelve subjects were white, while 6 were black and 2 Hispanic. Thirteen subjects were traditionally certificated while 7 were non-traditionally certificated. Nine of the subjects had left or were leaving the district, while 11 were staying. One person decided to stay after the interviews were conducted. One of the subjects who was planning on staying had problems with his certification renewal and did not return. The split between those staying and those who had left was done to approach possible differences in perception of the district and program by those who had left the district. The subjects were fairly evenly spread in experience, with four being first-year teachers, five second-year teachers, three third-year teachers, five fourth-year teachers, and three having finished their fifth year teaching.

Teachers who were asked to resign or were terminated were not asked to participate due to possible bias in their responses resulting from how they felt they had been treated by the district. After selecting these educators, they were asked to become subject respondents in an in-depth interview focusing on early career professional development, their thoughts on their future, and their beliefs regarding what might make them stay or leave the district in the future, or what made them leave. The data

gleaned from the interviews were categorized to show results relevant to the research questions asked, such as how strongly the program had affected respondents, either positively or negatively, in their early career. The study focused on the *stories* of the teachers interviewed, and anecdotal evidence is reported and used to reflect the feelings of the greater number of new-veteran teachers based on the overall reaction of a representative sampling of twenty early career teachers. The career induction program in question is a well defined, written curriculum program administered by a former teacher who has been in the district for thirty-five years, with the help of a group of mentor teachers and attended by all first- to fourth-year teachers in the district (the fourth year is considered “voluntary” but attendance is encouraged). There is a differentiated curriculum for first- and second- through fourth-year educators. The areas of focus are ones that have been deemed important in early urban educator preparation and are common in many programs, but little study has been done to gauge their effectiveness at this level.

This study most closely resembles another qualitative study conducted in 2004-05 with public school teachers in Portugal and reported on in the 2006 Research on Teacher Induction portion of the Teacher Education Yearbook (Dangel, 2006). While that study was more wide ranging, this one deals specifically with urban public education in the United States, and may have direct implications on how some local districts view their induction processes.

It was assumed that the experiences of secondary teachers in the urban setting, just as in other school settings, would be different from those of early childhood and

elementary teachers. Since there has been one in-depth study completed with elementary teachers in the largest school district of the same Midwestern city, it was appropriate that a study focusing on secondary teachers who fit the same profile would do well to further our understanding of why young urban teachers stay or leave their initial placement.

There was no attempt at deception on the part of the researcher. Participants were informed before the interviews that they were part of a select interview group for a University approved dissertation research project. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of the interviews.

In addition, this researcher has worked in the secondary setting during his career, as a teacher, as a coordinator, and as a principal. It was imperative to the research project that subjects be at ease during the interview process in order to elicit more genuine and open responses. Because of the professional background of said researcher, this was more easily accomplished with secondary teachers. Therefore, the subject pool consisted entirely of secondary (middle and high school level) educators.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

All group responses were audio taped. Tapes were transcribed word for word to paper for each interview. Horizontalization was completed first, where significant statements or thoughts were identified from the transcripts. The researcher highlighted these statements using a yellow marker. These statements were then organized into common themes. If a majority of the twenty teachers responded in a similar or identical

manner, these responses were highlighted with a blue marker. These common themes are discussed in the Findings section of this study.

In qualitative research, dependability can be a challenge. One way to facilitate accurate understanding by interview subjects is to use verbal prompts such as “tell me more,” or “do I understand you correctly...is that correct?” These approaches were used sparingly as checkpoints to increased dependability. The researcher remained acutely aware of the context of individual experience and prompted the subjects only to restate or confirm their own ideas. The researcher never provided examples or statements to subjects as that might decrease the validity of the results. To reduce bias on the part of the researcher, two outside sources with qualitative research experience were used to check the major themes found. The outside sources are both public educators with more than ten years’ teaching experience who have worked with qualitative research at the masters level. If they disagreed with the research findings, the researcher rechecked the transcripts to verify the data. In this way, themes that were not commonly stated were reduced and eliminated from the study. The outside sources used agreed with each other one hundred percent of the time on common themes, and both outside sources agreed with the researcher one hundred percent of the time on common themes in the research.

#### Interview Questions for Selected Teachers

Interviews were conducted in approximately 45-minute blocks at the teachers’ school or residence. They were recorded and transcribed for use in the findings section of the dissertation. The questions used were chosen because they provided the

researcher with the best insight into the mindset of the teachers in the study, both those who chose to stay, and those who chose to leave the district. These questions also were framed to help best answer the researcher's questions regarding the feelings of these teachers about the program and its effect on them as early career urban instructors. The questions were:

1. What were the main expectations and performance events you were asked to complete during your induction classes?
2. Did you feel supported by the induction program in your first years teaching? Please elaborate.
3. What kinds of feedback are/were you given by the leaders of your induction program? Your mentor? Your administrator? Is/Was the feedback primarily positive or negative? Give one or two examples.
4. What are some things that the district does well in training new teachers and getting them familiar with the district/the classroom/the working environment?
5. What are some things that are done poorly in the district's training and induction of new teachers or that the district could improve upon in your opinion? Be as specific as possible.
6. Were the expectations of a first year teacher clearly spelled out to you when you began the program? Do you feel those expectations are fair? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel you were able to make positive changes in the culture around you? Were you asked to conform to a pre-set standard of teaching? If so, did this in

any way keep you from achieving your goals? Was it helpful in achieving them?

8. Identify a specific part of the induction program that you felt helped you as a teacher.
9. How did this program affect your daily life as a teacher?
10. What changes did you make in your classroom because of this program?

There were also questions designed for teachers who have left the district.

They included the following.

1. Were there any specific parts of the induction program you felt did not add to your growth as a new teacher?
2. Please name some factors that led you to pursue another job outside the district?
3. Please explain where you are teaching now in as much detail as possible.
4. What specifically led you to leave Triangle Hills School District?
5. Would you consider your experience at Triangle Hills to be positive? Please explain.

Facing the challenges that many landlocked older districts face, the school district has decided to focus on what it can control. In 2003, the district began to give an intensified four-year program of induction to its newest teachers. All experienced teachers (more than three years teaching) who are new to the district are required to attend one year of the new teacher training, and to have a mentor from their building assist them in acclimating to the district. All new teachers, or those with less than three years experience, are required to attend at least three years of teacher training. This

allows for a focused induction into the culture and climate of the school district, and for the district to assert some influence on the young teachers' way of approaching their job.

Examples of the district's approach to the mentor/new teacher relationship as it relates to induction are spelled out below. Since the first year teachers are required to do the most, the description has focused on them. Second through fourth year teachers have similar but decreasing responsibilities.

The mentor/mentee relationship is well spelled out for those who take time to read the manual provided by the district. Titles of chapters include such items as *Providing Direct Assistance: Mentors Can Directly Assist Their Protégés By:*, followed by a laundry list of things that mentors can and should do to help young teachers be successful. There is also a year-at-a-glance checklist for teachers in their first three to four years in the district to help keep teachers moving toward goals the school district defines for new teachers. There are both constant and variable goals. Recently, the focus has been on professional learning, continuing education, best practice, classroom discipline, and lesson planning.

Teachers new to the Triangle Hills School District are given a binder with approximately 200 pages of material included. Much of the early part of the manual concentrates on mentor/mentee relationships and the role of the mentor in the new teacher induction process. The mentor is to act as confidant, teacher, observer, and example to the new teacher. The new teachers are expected to fill out a log of observations, including both the new teacher observing the mentor and the mentor

observing the new teacher. Mentors are supposed to meet with their mentee to discuss these observations.

The induction program manual covers ten chapters. These chapters include:

1. An introduction to the program that contains definitions of roles, a short glance at the year ahead, worksheets to fill out for mentor/mentee and a checklist of accomplished tasks
2. A section on expectations and activities for the year in more detail, as well as a defined school calendar with important dates for the new teacher. This section defines the dates for first, second, third, and fourth “strand” teachers. Each year the expectations of each strand and how many times they meet decreases.
3. An entire chapter detailing Missouri certification requirements, Professional Development Plans, and a log to use for in-service time.
4. A chapter devoted to Harry Wong’s “First Days of School,” highlighting the importance of procedure, order, and routine in the classroom.
5. A chapter devoted to positive instructional environment
6. A chapter on the physical classroom environment and materials that should be available to or provided for learners.
7. A chapter on discipline in the classroom. This chapter is extremely short and focuses on building relationships with students to avoid discipline situations and in cases where discipline is necessary, doing it with dignity.
8. A chapter on instructional strategies. This chapter is full of one sheet “tips” that obviously are gleaned from current “best practice” gurus.

9. A full chapter on assessments tied to curriculum. This chapter covers the district approved curriculum for each subject, the lesson plan format, definitions of many education-specific terms, and a section on keeping parents happy through better communication of expectations and consequences.
10. The final chapter covers substitutes and how to prepare for them and report back what happened while the new teacher was gone.

Scattered in amongst the timelines, timesheets, forms, and procedures are many pages of quotes from philosophers of education and of life. These include Samuel Johnson, Horace Mann, Harry Wong, the Dalai Lama, and Socrates, to name a few.

All first year teachers are required to attend meetings once a month at a different district building. These meetings are structured to teach “best practice” to first year teachers that is being used in the district at the time and that is a part of the district’s CSIP plan. Recent topics have included backward lesson planning, data based teaching, pre and post testing, writing across the curriculum, and intradepartmental collaboration. In addition to their monthly meetings, the first year teachers are subject to up to two walk-throughs by the district coordinator and collaborating teacher reviewers from a local university partnership. While these walk-throughs are not part of their Performance Based Teacher Evaluation (PBTE) process, there is a formal discussion or a review sheet for every walk-through.

The first year teacher is responsible for creating a professional portfolio with twenty definite sections that match the district’s PBTE evaluation tool. This portfolio is designed to give the teacher the background knowledge of how they are performing on

district criteria such as classroom management and professional development. It is also used by the building administrators to help evaluate the teacher's progress.

All first year participants are also required to attend two workshops outside the district. In the past these have centered on urban education topics, BEST (early literacy training), Kagen (cooperative learning structures), and BIST (behavior intervention).

All first year teachers are assigned a building mentor and the mentor/mentee relationship is supposed to help them grow accustomed to their building's culture faster. Mentors are supposed to periodically check on their mentee, sit in on classes, discuss their feelings with them, and provide support that might not be possible through the building administration.

The person responsible for reorganizing and introducing new methodology to the induction program for the district is a former speech and drama teacher who was extremely well thought of by most of her peers over the course of her teaching career. She has held various duties since permanently leaving the classroom eight years ago, including working as an instructional coach and a curriculum specialist. As the district Professional Development Coordinator, she convened a committee to decide what the most important aspects of the first years of teaching were and what needed to be addressed with new teachers to maximize the chances of success as well as increase the chances of teacher retention. The list that the committee compiled included very much the same things as the chapters covered by the new teacher manual for the district. In the last year, the district has expanded the coordinator's duties to include those of writing some grants for the district, including a smaller learning communities grant that

took over two months and many committee meetings to complete. According to the coordinator, this has “taken away from” her time to work on the induction program.

According to the coordinator, and released with her approval, the following information has been gleaned from the new induction program:

1. Triangle Hills School District has gone from a retention rate which was far below the state and national average to above the state and national average for first year to second year retention.
2. The district has seen an improvement from far below state and national averages to at the state and national averages for second and third year teacher retention.
3. The district has seen *no improvement* in fourth or fifth year teacher retention, and the district continues to skew far below state and national averages in fourth and fifth year teacher retention.

According to the coordinator and several superintendents in the district, the primary focus of the district’s new teacher induction is to ease the transition for new teachers, both those who come directly from traditional college or university settings and those who come from alternative certification programs, to the culture and set of challenges that exist in the district.

The district’s human resources department provided this researcher with statistical information regarding the district’s retention of new teachers. This information is included in the Table 1.

Table 1

*Five Year Study of New Teacher Attrition in Triangle Hills School District*

	<b>03-04 Hires</b>	<b>04-05 Hires</b>	<b>05-06 Hires</b>	<b>06-07 Hires</b>	<b>07-08 Hires</b>
<b># of Teachers</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>651</b>
<b># of New Hires</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Left After 1 Year</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Left After 2 Years</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Left After 3 Years</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Left After 4 Years</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

As can be seen in the above table, the district has increased new hires by 65% even if the last, slightly lower year's new hires are used. The attrition rate has improved on a percentage basis when looking at first and second year teachers. Still, what stands out is the sheer number of teachers the district has lost from each incoming group of new hires. If one looks at the district's new teacher induction as an investment, this has to call into question whether that investment is paying off. For the 2005-06 hiring class, the latest year for which we have complete four year information, 66 of 102 new hires that year left the district by the end of 2008-09. When over 60% of new hires leave before they have put in five years in the district, it does not appear that the district is achieving a successful retention rate.

What is more, every year's data tell nearly the same story. In 2003-04, the district hired 65 new teachers. At the end of the 2006-07 school year, 41 of those 65 new teachers had left the district. 2003-04 was the first year of the revamped new

teacher orientation system, so if this is the baseline year, one would hope to see improvement in retention in subsequent years. In 2004-05, 86 new teachers were hired. Of those new hires, 50 left within four years. While the number of new hires has increased and so has the number of new hires staying past four years, the *percentage* leaving at or before their fifth year continued to stay at what could be perceived as an unacceptable level.

Participants in the study were chosen from among teachers in the public schools of Triangle Hills School District, a pseudonym for a medium sized school district in a medium sized Midwestern city. Participants were from the same school district to help minimize any variables that might affect their common experience. This can be kept to a minimum by using teachers who all work for the same district and by using respondents who meet the experience criteria, thus keeping their experiences as common as possible. The district chosen has two middle schools and two high schools, as well as a secondary alternative school, and serves a total student population of around 7500, fluctuating due to a high degree of transience. It has a free and reduced lunch rate of nearly 70%. Approximately 40% of the students come from single-parent households and 75% of the district's students are African American. The standardized test scores, graduation rate, and persistence to graduation of the students in the district are below state and national averages. Discipline is an issue for many teachers, and students often come to the classroom ill prepared to succeed academically. All of these factors easily fit the definition of "urban." The interview process was conducted

during the spring semester of the 2008-09 school year and findings were reported for the fall/winter of 2009.

### Instruments

The twenty teachers chosen, after signing a waiver, were interviewed using tape recordings. These recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked with the participants for validity. Participants were given the chance to add anything they wished at that time. These responses were kept in a locked cabinet during the research study. The responses were compared to find overall themes that help answer the question of how early career teachers perceive the successes and failures of the induction program, as well as the equally important question of what districts can do to improve their early service induction programs to better serve their new teachers. The researcher analyzed all documents related to the early career induction program at Triangle Hills. A comparison was then made between what the teachers interviewed said about the program and its effectiveness and what the curriculum of the program says it will do.

When all the interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher compared individual responses to each question asked, searching for common answers, categorizing them as to how they answered the specific research question. Knowing that there was some pre-conceived idea of what the researcher expected to find, the researcher made every effort to look only at what was said, and not to read into facial expression or voice inflection.

Once the subjects' answers had been studied for their relationship to the study questions, the researcher attempted to find major themes in their answers. If a majority of respondents answered a question in a very similar fashion, this might represent a theme. If it in turn helped to answer a research question, this merited including in the findings.

The findings are reported in the Research Findings section of this study. There must be a better understanding of perceived positives and negatives of induction programs. While it is not the sole reason that teachers stay or leave the district, it is a key component the district uses in trying to slow teacher attrition. The question then arises, is the program meeting its stated purpose? The goal of this study was to help find an answer to this question from the perspective of the teachers involved. When analyzing what the subjects said in their answers to the interview questions, the researcher went back to the basic research question. Did the subjects believe that they were being served by this program in the best way possible? If it was not meeting their expectations in certain areas, then the answer to the research question must be at least a qualified "no".

The questions posed in the interviews related to the purpose of this study directly. Each question is tied to the research question dealing with the perception of early career teachers of the successes and failures of the induction program in making them feel successful in the classroom and in the district. Early in the interviews, the researcher hoped to put the subjects at ease by making them the experts regarding the induction program. Because this is a qualitative study, the questions posed focused

more on the subjective experience of each interviewee, as well as asking them to look objectively at what the district was trying to do. Their feelings matter because they are the sole arbiters of the success of the program. If the district does not keep happily employed, successful young teachers, they have not succeeded in retaining valuable professionals.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal factors that led those who left the district to leave and how the district's induction program either provided (or did not provide) the tools necessary to make these new teachers effective in the classroom.

In the interest of a more full understanding of the subjects involved in the interviews, a short profile of each of the subjects interviewed is included. The subjects are identified by the numbers 1-20. Each teacher's unique history can aid in the interpretation of the results reported in this chapter.

#### Subject Data

As planned, twenty interviews were conducted. The subjects fell into the following categories: There were 13 men and 7 women. Twelve subjects were white, 6 were black, and 2 were Hispanic. Thirteen subjects were traditionally certified, and 7 were non-traditionally certified. Nine of the subjects had left or were leaving the district, and 11 were staying. One person decided to stay after the interviews were conducted. One of the subjects who planned on staying had problems with his certification renewal and returned only as a long-term sub this year. The subjects were fairly evenly distributed by experience. Four were first-year teachers, five were second-year teachers, three were third-year teachers, five were fourth-year teachers, and three had finished their fifth year of teaching.

## Teacher Profiles

### *Subject 1*

Subject 1 is a white male, 24 years old, and a first-year middle school math teacher. He hales originally from southern Illinois. He purposely chose an urban environment as his first teaching assignment because he felt, “if I can make it here I can teach anywhere successfully.” He had what he called a “challenging” year, but overall felt “successful.” Due to the health problems of a traveling teacher, he was asked to assume her daily room assignments so she could be in one room all day. He worked in five different classrooms, teaching a double blocked math class to low achievers. He was getting married the following summer and, because of this, was relocating to another city. As of our spring interview, he had two job possibilities, both of which were in suburban, affluent school districts. Subject 1 was earnest, forthright, and expressed the feeling that he was “called” to teach in an urban setting this year. He spoke at length regarding every question, and was careful to be very positive about almost every question.

### *Subject 2*

Subject 2 is a 26 year old white male science teacher who is in his second year teaching at the high school level. The subject is a wrestling coach, and when he began his career, approached his classroom job as something he had to do to get to his passion, coaching. He admitted this freely in the interview, and said his first year was basically “a nightmare.” He was recommended for hire into the district by his former wrestling coach from high school who is now athletic director at his school. He was

placed under heavy surveillance due to lack of classroom control his first year, but has made great strides during his second year. He is an alternatively certificated teacher, but is pursuing a master's degree in his subject area. He intends to return next year.

*Subject 3*

Subject 3 is an African-American male math instructor who is 62 years old. He is in his third year of teaching, but this is his first year in the building. He was a contractor in his previous career. He is alternatively certified. In his own words, Subject 3 “struggled” this year. He was very positive in our interview, but already had been told he would not be returning next school year. He hoped to be able to find another teaching job, possibly at a city charter school for next year.

*Subject 4*

Subject 4 is a 27-year-old white female drama and speech instructor at a high school. She is traditionally certified and has been teaching in the district for three years. While immensely popular with the students and staff, she has a high level of frustration over perceived slights from the district and what she sees as a lack of communication between district and building level decisions. When the interview was conducted she had just found out that she was cut from the Theatre and Speech department and was being reassigned to the English department, for which she is not fully certified. This decision was due to budget cuts in the district and her lack of time on the job compared to other teachers in her department. While she understood the decision, she was anxious about what would happen to her competitive debate team. She has had a high

degree of success recruiting for it and the school has risen in performance in debate since she has been the teacher and coach. She is returning.

#### *Subject 5*

Subject 5 is a 24-year-old white male second-year teacher in the district at a middle school. Subject 5 is highly qualified, having completed his Master's degree before starting teaching. He is a graduate of what is considered to be a leading teaching university in the state. He hails originally from the area, and wanted to return here to teach. The first job that was offered was in Triangle Hills, and he took it "knowing the reputation of the district," but considers himself one who takes challenges. He is a person of few words, but was very thoughtful in his answers. He was also decisive and gave some of the most straightforward answers of any of the subjects. He is planning to return for his third year.

#### *Subject 6*

Subject 6 is a white female first-year Family and Consumer Science (FACS) teacher at the high school level. She is 35 years old. She obtained alternative certification after working for several years as a dietician at a major local hospital. Her reason for the switch was so that she could "spend more time with my kids." While she is trying to maintain a positive outlook, she can see the frustrations of classroom teachers. She was restrained during the interview, but was forthright in her answers. She is planning return for a second year.

*Subject 7*

Subject 7 is a white male 25-year-old social studies teacher at a middle school. He is traditionally certified through a highly regarded teacher education program. He is in his first year teaching. Subject 7 is a very personable and open person. He is not a cheerleader for the program or his district, but has a distinctly positive outlook on teaching and why he is in the profession. This tends to color his responses. He is realistic, and sees the limitations of any induction program. His responses would best be described as hopeful about the future. He is leaving at the end of the year.

*Subject 8*

Subject 8 is an African-American female third-year science teacher who began her teaching career at a charter school and moved after her first year to a high school in Triangle Hills. She is 27 years old. She teaches mostly AP level courses and still experiences frustration with the students and their “lack of willingness to try.” She is positive about the program and about her experiences in the district. However, she tends to feel that there are too many expectations placed on first year teachers in the district, and that there is little mentoring going on in the building where she works. Subject 8 plans to stay in the district.

*Subject 9*

Subject 9 is an African-American male math teacher. He is 33 years old. This is his first teaching position. He is non-traditionally certificated, working on a traditional certification. He comes originally from a business background, and has a Master’s degree in Business Administration. He is still confused by many things about the

day-to-day process of education as a business, though he does have a background as both a volunteer and paid coach at the high-school level. He is a former college football player, and carries much of the coach with him in his classroom dealings. He, like Subject 8, feels the students are undisciplined mentally. He feels supported, but describes himself as one who likes to learn things on his own. He had planned on returning but, due to certification difficulties, was unable to.

*Subject 10*

Subject 10 is a white female first-year teacher in the district who did her student teaching last year at the high school at which she is currently employed. She is teaching reading and English. Subject 10 expressed deep distress at the way the district runs its induction program and how there is little tie-in to the building. She felt like she was serving two masters for much of her first year, and described her main emotion as “frustration.” She is planning to return for a second year, but is keeping her options open beyond that.

*Subject 11*

Subject 11 is an African-American female second-year teacher who is in her first year at the high school where she works. She began her career in the 2007-08 school year at a middle school in Triangle Hills. She is an English teacher. Her expectation was that the high school would be easier in terms of behavior management than her first year. She is a popular teacher among the students, but her overall frustration with the school outweighs any positive. At the end of the school year she

made a sudden decision to leave for a position at an inner city charter academy where she felt she could do more good.

*Subject 12*

Subject 12 is a Latina (of Puerto Rican descent) female third-year high school Spanish teacher. She is 27 years old. She is traditionally certificated. She has taught her entire three years in the same high school. She has decided to leave the district at the end of the school year. Her frustrations do not lie with the students, and her honesty and openness in attacking the problems she feels exist in the school made the interview process an easy one.

*Subject 13*

Subject 13 is a 24-year-old first year African-American male math teacher at the middle school level. He began his career as a long-term substitute, but was given the full teacher's schedule after passing the praxis exam. He was granted full teacher status in October of the 2008-09 school year. He came to teaching from a business background. A very popular teacher among the students and well respected for his attempts to turn double-blocked pre-algebra students into math achievers, he decided to leave the district and teaching at the end of the year to pursue a vocation where he could make more money.

*Subject 14*

Subject 14 is a 26-year-old white male social studies teacher who taught his first two years in Triangle Hills at a high school. He left the district prior to the 2008-09 school year for a position in a primarily white suburban school district. Subject 14 was

extremely popular with the students and the administration, and was considered a rising star in the district. His decision to leave was characterized by some administrators as a bad move on his part, but he was relaxed and seemed genuinely to feel he had made the right decision to move. His only regret was leaving the students he had grown close to.

*Subject 15*

Subject 15 is a 26-year-old white male third-year math teacher at the high school level. He spent his first year at Triangle Hills in a middle school. He was very disappointed in his overall experience, and it came out clearly in his answers. He left the district after being offered a position at the affluent suburban district that borders Triangle Hills.

*Subject 16*

Subject 16 is a 28-year-old Hispanic male social studies teacher and football coach at the high school level. He is in his second year of teaching, both at Triangle Hills. He came to public education after working as a graduate assistant at a Division II football program very near Kansas City. Subject 16 is non-traditionally certificated. He is originally from the west coast, and has an easy rapport with the students in the school. He works hard not to be characterized as a typical “jock.” His responses were thoughtful, but measured. He is planning to return for another year, but has interviewed outside the district each of the last two years.

*Subject 17*

Subject 17 is a 27-year-old white male special education teacher and track coach. He is traditionally certificated. He is in his third year teaching and second year at Triangle Hills, after spending one year at an inner-city high school in Kansas City. Subject 17 was closely guarded in his responses during the interview, fearing his answers might be seen as disloyal to the district. When he relaxed, he began to give more full and useful answers. He is planning on returning to Triangle Hills next school year.

*Subject 18*

Subject 18 is a 63-year-old white male social studies teacher in his third year of teaching, all in Triangle Hills. He is alternatively certified. He came to education from a business management background, specifically running a chain of highly successful local restaurants in a business partnership with his brothers. The partnership ran into financial trouble a few years ago, leading him to seek other work, and he believed he was always called to teaching. This former paratrooper found quickly that teaching was harder than he expected. The brother of one of the assistant principals, he is planning to return for his fourth year.

*Subject 19*

Subject 19 is a 36-year-old African-American male special education teacher and football coach. He is alternatively certified. He came to teaching through a background in college football coaching. This is his third year teaching and third year in Triangle Hills. He was open and gregarious in his interview, giving answers almost

as quickly as the interviewer could ask them. He has strongly held beliefs about schools, about the students, and about the program. He is planning to return next school year.

### *Subject 20*

Subject 20 is a 24-year-old white female communication arts teacher at a middle school. This is her first teaching job, and this was her first year, though she did complete her student teaching in the same district. Originally from Michigan, she moved here to be with her fiancé, who works for a local company. She was considered highly successful by her principal this year, and is moving to the high school where she student-taught for the 2009-10 school year. She has an open nature and enjoys talking. Hers was one of the longest interviews. Subject 20 plans to stay at least one more year.

## Overview of Findings

The interview process took place at different locations within the Triangle Hills School District. As often as possible, the researcher visited the school site where the subject worked. To put the subjects at ease, the researcher conducted many of the interviews in the subjects' classrooms. For those who had left the district, home visits were the most common place for the interviews.

All the interview questions were administered in the same order to each subject. There were five additional questions posed to the subjects who had left or were leaving the district. These questions focused on the subjects' perceptions of the induction program as it related to their overall experience in the district and as a factor in their having chosen not to stay. The format used to analyze the data was narrative data

analysis, due to the nature of the study and the interview transcripts to be analyzed. The researcher re-read the interviews several times looking for *themes* to emerge that fit the research questions posed.

While the answers the twenty subjects gave were not uniform, there were several themes that were constant across a majority of the responses and that were helpful in answering the research questions. These responses are categorized in terms of how they fit the research questions asked. These included:

*The teachers did not believe that their personal pedagogy was changed significantly by the experience of the program.* The idea of the program having a day-to-day positive affect on teachers in their classroom was not immediately obvious. When questioned regarding their feelings about their personal pedagogy, the response of Subject 6 was representative of twelve of her fellow teachers:

Some of the classes, like the BEST or new teacher orientation through UMKC helped. That helped because they were more classroom specific. The one setback was that by the time we were able to get into those it was already too late. It would have been more beneficial before we started as opposed to halfway through the year.

Despite feeling that a few meetings outside the district helped her, this teacher is damning with faint praise. The last part of the quote says that despite their benefit, the classes were too late in coming and should have been introduced much sooner.

Subject 5 felt more strongly and stated very succinctly how he felt:

Just putting objectives on board because that's what they want to see, having a lesson plan out, and I guess communicating with parents. ... They did a pretty good job of how to fill out paperwork; not the actual teaching.

This is relatively damning, and should create concern, as changing teaching to fit the district's desired model is one of the key components of the program.

When pressed, the subjects mentioned that they paid more attention to lesson plans, and that they had gotten to know more about the overall district philosophy of education. They mentioned learning more about procedures teachers should use during the first weeks of school. However, none of them felt the program changed the basic way they approached their work. A typical response was that given by Subject 18, a third-year teacher who was alternatively certificated and who came from a hospitality management background. He was not the harshest critic of the program, but his response was typical of most of the responses to this general line of questioning. They began by searching for something cogent to say and finally fell back on the common experience of scrambling as a new instructor:

I suppose, on the whole, there were some gaps in some of the things. You end up turning more to....first year teachers tend to hang together. You end up getting more of your information from each other. What am I going to do about lesson plans? Well, I'm going to do this...Bellwork. You have to have bellwork they're coming to check it. What are you doing? Well I'm doing this...Oh, can I borrow that? Sure. We were so overwhelmed we would share and loan each other our work because we felt we were in jeopardy if we didn't have it.

The response given by subject 18 was rambling, and he lost track of what he was trying to say more than once. The researcher waited, and after gathering himself the best response he could give was one in which he tried to discuss the difficulties of expectations when the teacher is not completely sure

what is being asked of them. The subject's body language, stiff, looking at the ceiling, putting hand to forehead, was telling.

Subject 1 answered a question regarding how the program affected his teaching in the following manner:

I guess I'd have to answer the question that the district's training was lacking in specifics maybe? It was a lot like college maybe where a lot of the situations we've talked about aren't applicable to my situation....

Subject 2 had this to say about his early training experience:

Maybe with a master teacher we could have sat down and had them say 'here's what you should do your first week--here's the first day. You'll have kids for a little bit, 30-40 minutes, half day the first day, get to know them a little bit, some ice breakers'...I don't know, that would have helped me.

The subject appeared to have more to say and the interviewer asked him to say anything else he felt he needed to:

No, I just wish we would have felt like it was more worthwhile. I guess you can chalk it up to us all being pretty green and ready to get in our rooms but we were bored, really.

Subject 5 had ambivalent feelings regarding any expectations pedagogically that were placed on him:

I guess a lot of people say the portfolio. Even though they say no one's going to look at it. Besides that, nothing really except parent teacher conferences were stressful. Other than that no major expectations.

This was the stated feeling of eighteen of the twenty teachers interviewed for the study. The responses were repeated in different language but with the same feeling by almost all of the subjects.

*Culturally, the teachers were more sure that the program helped them better understand children of poverty and ones who grow up in an urban environment.* Only two of the teachers who were interviewed grew up in an urban setting. Common quotes were based on the feedback they have received from administrators and those who run the program. Examples include Subject 9, who is a 33-year-old first-year teacher who came to education through non-traditional certification. Even though he shares a common racial background with his students, his middle class upbringing made him at first feel alienated from them. He was looking for a way to better connect and found help through the induction program:

The only problems I encountered would be the behavior of my kids. Nobody would just give me answers, but I don't like having the answer given to me anyway. So they would say 'this is how I did it, but you have to do your own thing.' I had to think about different strategies that I could use to get control over that kid or make that kid actually work. An example would be I had a student that just always caused problems, doing no work. He didn't want to do anything. I wanted him out of my classroom...he was a problem child and would jack up the class. You have to figure out how to handle that kid. After a month or two I was able to figure out what makes him work and now he has an A in my class.

The interviewer asked the subject if he felt the program helped him with understanding his students better and he answered simply:

“Uh, yes.”

Alternatively, not every teacher felt like the challenge the students posed was a bad thing. Subject 5, a second year white male teacher from a nearby suburb, had a slightly different and relatively uncommon view of his first year ability to connect with urban youth. He was one of only three teachers to express similar feelings:

I'm the type that thrives in difficult situations. That's the way I was brought up to deal with reality. It is what it is. You have to deal in any way you can. You have times where you're like 'I'm either going to go insane or I'm going to deal with it and I choose to deal.' Everyone here's kind of that strong personality and I think if you last a month you can last ten years.

When Subject 13 was asked about his experience with the students of the district and how the program may or may not have helped him he had this response:

It helped us to use positive instead of negative feedback. We have kind of a hostile environment. Instead of us getting hostile back, it showed us how to diffuse that. We learned how to take advantage of the situation to show they have to take responsibility.

Subject 16 felt that the district does well in teaching the cycle of poverty, utilizing a commonly used text in their training:

First two weeks. I sat in on the Ruby Payne stuff, I don't know if it's the only way to go, but it did help me build relationships and manage my classroom.

Subject 17 felt similarly about his experience:

I think they tell us what to expect from our community. We are mostly young, and we are mostly suburban, even the black teachers. I think they're trying to help us with that part.

*The teachers universally expressed frustration at not being able to get accustomed to their individual schools.* Fourteen of the interview subjects felt that they did not get the chance to get into their buildings in a timely manner and, especially during their two weeks of training before the beginning of school, they were made to attend classes that were much less geared to the essential daily activities of the school and more esoteric in nature, which served to create more tension entering the school year rather than less. Most expressed that they felt they did not know their colleagues in

the building as well, and were not as well acquainted with their principals or assistant principals as they thought they should be. Subject 5 illustrated this in an answer regarding a situation that he was working through politically with his department head:

I got hired originally...to run credit recovery but they didn't have any kids in it yet. So I sat for three weeks. Every once in a while a principal would come and go 'you been sittin (sic) in on any classes?' My head of department wasn't even there when I got hired and I didn't realize until months later why I was getting the cold shoulder. I had no idea that the reason I was getting that cold shoulder was because she didn't agree with my hire or have anything to do with it...There was no relationship built there.

Subject 7 had similar concerns. His response sums up most of the newer teachers' anxiety when first entering the district and about the focus of their early training:

What they did poorly? The amount of time to be in our room and a head's up about the week of professional development was lacking. The first day we were in our room I thought we'd have three days in our room to get set up, so that first day I was going around and figuring out things I needed...And that was our only day in the classroom. So I had to come up on a Saturday for five hours just to get my room ready. So, before school even started I was already exhausted. We need to make things more clear and give more time in our schools.

Subject 10 had a similar response in her interview:

I felt like we were rushed through the entire first week and there wasn't time to be in our classrooms preparing. They said 'Here's what you need to do, do this, do this, do this, the first two weeks.' It just felt like we didn't have enough time to actually prepare for the school year because we were being rushed off to here and there to learn about things I don't even remember. I think it would have been more beneficial for us to be in the classroom to actually be working on things that would help us out during the school year.

Subject 20 felt almost exactly the same way in her response to the same question:

I think the first week was kind of annoying. The reason why is because you sat there all day and listen to all these people talk hypothetically, kind of lecture, lecture, lecture, 'this is what's going to happen, this is what's going to happen', and then you were given 3 hours to start on your room before the rest of the teachers came in.

Subject 15, who had left the district, believed strongly that the first few days did him little good. When asked what could have been done better, he had this to share:

They could help train new teachers how to teach. I had no education background and bachelors in math--provisional certification. Knowing my background I would think they'd want to help me. Instead I was handed a curriculum and a brand new textbook, and they said good luck.

*There was little difference in answers between those who had left and those who stayed.* In examining the second research question, there was a difference, though slighter than expected, in the way the teachers who had left or were leaving answered the questions posed to them versus the way those teachers who planned to stay answered the same questions. The expectation was that the teachers who were leaving or had left would have a significantly more negative view of the process and of the district, skewing their answers. While this was true in a few cases, it was not by any means an overriding sentiment. On the whole, the staff seemed to appreciate the effort that was put out for them by the person who ran the program and by the district as a whole, but thought the process needed much revamping to meet its goals. While it is, in theory, a program to help ease the transition from college or the business world to the classroom, it, if not increasing the level of stress and tension, did nothing to decrease it at the beginning of the teacher's career. This can be seen in several respondents' quotes regarding whether they saw the program as a help to them at the beginning of a career.

There are several areas of concern. Of the teachers who left, only four explicitly expressed a negative opinion of Triangle Hills or of the induction process in their responses. Reasons for leaving were typically focused on better working conditions, proximity to home, or both.

Subject 6 gave the following reason for leaving the district:

I had never experienced an urban or an African American setting, but it's not a setting in which I feel entirely comfortable. I feel there was also a lack of standards the students are held to.

Subject 12 was succinct in her reasons for leaving:

Money's a factor. I would also say some of the recent policy additions...the way our administration has taken and ran with them and made them into basically a monster.

An *almost* universal appreciation of the person who was in charge of running the new-teacher orientation program was expressed both by the subjects who stayed and by those who left. All but one of the respondents thought the person in charge did as much as she could for them with little in the way of resources, especially since she is in charge of the entire district's new-teacher induction and has only herself as a staff. None of the respondents blamed her for the lack of continuity between the induction program and individual buildings. Only one respondent, Subject 15, expressed less than positive feelings about the person coordinating the program, and his responses could be categorized as ambivalent. The head of the program is well-respected and the teachers appreciated her efforts, knowing she has an almost impossible job. In fact, in comparison to the views expressed about building administration, the subjects' views of her were very positive.

Subject responses showing this included Subject 1:

The coach [director] every time she came in she was gave us notes and she was very positive.

Subject 2 agreed:

...once I got there and we were sitting around talking about what's going on and Gloria [the director] would go through some different things like I know we went through how to talk to parents during conferences and that helped.

Subject 4 had very strong feelings regarding the director even though she was very frustrated by the program:

It was almost a joke, but the one person who was in charge of us first year teachers was someone who totally helped me and she was so much support because I could call her...

Sixteen subjects took time to recognize the busy schedules of their building level administrators while questioning their dedication to helping young teachers grow.

Subject 7's response was indicative of 19 subjects' feelings:

One day the induction program leader came in and by the end of the day I had a (observation report) sheet in my mailbox. Here in the building sometimes we'll have an observation or walkthrough and it's like two weeks later and I don't even remember what I did that day. But to get it back two hours later was really hard for her and I appreciated it.

Subject 10, a 24 year old white female with traditional credentials, had a similar reaction:

I feel like our coach (program director) for secondary teachers was really good. You know, sending us things that would help us throughout the year and everything like that. She's been pretty helpful helping us put together our portfolio, things like that. Providing us help whenever we need it, she's there when we need to talk to her. She sometimes comes to our classes if we need feedback. But everyone else I haven't felt like were a big or good part of the program.

Subject 6 was very enthusiastic about most aspects of her brief teaching career after changing jobs from the health care field, but her feelings about this program were very similar to the other respondents:

I really don't (how much good it did) because I don't know what other new teachers have to do but from what I know from the DESE mentor I have through career and technical I haven't heard of anyone else who has to do journals, required meetings, that kind of things. So in that way it's different but I also think other districts have the support we didn't have from the building.

*All respondents expressed some frustration and even confusion over certain expectations.* The district's induction manual mentions "work product" several times. Work product was consistently mentioned in the guides produced for this program and was to be used in the induction program. The only "work product" that most teachers could remember when questioned was their portfolio, a piece that 15 of the subjects said was a waste of time. When asked what work product he was expected to produce, Subject 15, a teacher who completed his first year in Triangle Hills, then left the district, responded tersely:

I was told you had to handle discipline and manage the people in your classroom. I was a first year teacher and I was handed a double blocked algebra classroom for struggling students, never taught before, didn't know how it would work out, rather than be shown how to maximize a situation, it was 'this is how I want you to discipline students. Don't send them to the office because nothing will change'...I guess I had to complete a portfolio and I had to go to monthly meetings.

Subject 14, another teacher who left the district after teaching there for two years at the high school level, was perplexed by the question.

If I remember correctly there were...I actually don't remember there being clear expectations. It was more like suggestions methods et cetera for teaching to the current trends they were trying to influence in their

buildings. Whatever they were doing with the faculty was what they were doing with us.

Subject 14 went on to discuss his feelings regarding the induction program as a whole compared to the informal support he got from veteran teachers:

In terms of the induction program, one or two times I got observed and I got paperwork like a formal observation back. From admin was usually we had three scheduled two unscheduled and I received all five. It was ten minutes at the most because they got called out to do something different because they got called out to attend to a situation, you often would have to go into that administrator's office to ask for your own feedback. Where I taught you developed a lot of close relationships at least from my end some who were like me or even veterans who would drop in to watch you or you them and some of the most credible feedback I got was from them. They understood the situations we dealt with. They had long term careers and could tell us what we needed. Because of the turnover our veterans had a vested interest not only in seeing us succeed but in making sure we could stand on our two feet and not let things get crazy. They wanted that turnover trend to end.

Teachers who have remained and were still immersed in the program seemed to have a clearer memory of the things that early service teachers were specifically asked to do, but because of their proximity to it, seemed more exasperated by the process.

Subject 20, a first-year middle school instructor who began her career by student teaching at one of the high schools, had this to say:

What's not good is that they have us do this portfolio and journal entries and reading books and writing summaries on them, kind of a whole bunch of pointless work. I understand the portfolio. I can look at my portfolio and go 'this is what I did', but it doesn't really have meaning to me. The reason why is because I'd rather give in everything that I've done--all my lesson plans, all my unit plans, all my assessments all in one. But by chunking it up into 20 objectives, it just seems so redundant and it just randomly gets put together where half the stuff is all the same thing. So giving them a full unit would sum that thing up in 2 minutes...

Subject 6 had this to say about the sometimes vague nature of first year teaching in Triangle Hills:

I think sometimes it would be easier if I had “you need to do this”--a set curriculum or lesson plan to follow as you grow. Ours in FACS is very vague. Some guidelines would have been better. But it’s also been neat to develop on our own.

Subject 18 felt the negativity was too much in the district from early on, and that served to confuse teachers about what was right:

I think that first year teacher needs more support. Maybe restructure, a pat on the back somehow. I understand that the administration is under pressure because they’re getting pressured to do so many things. But sometimes they tend to just tell you how terrible you are, only to have them turn around and tell you how great you are. You get even as a first year teacher about midway through the year you get feeling bad that they have to warn you or threaten you that you have to do things this way instead of just saying here’s a new program we want you on board. There’s too much negativism.

Subject 18 added the feeling that all nine of the teachers who were or are currently filling coaching or sponsor positions shared:

The one thing I can say is that coaching here is not easy. It shouldn’t be easy really...but I feel that sometimes they forgot we had other added responsibilities. The building needed one thing and the district needed something different. It was really uncomfortable sometimes.

The second overarching question this researcher had going into the study was whether there was a difference in perception between those who stayed and those who left about the support they received from the program. The answers did not show a clear pattern, but the responses of 15 subjects out of 20 interviewed was one of ambivalence to the program the way it is run now, while all subjects save one expressed understanding of the hard work put into the program by the person who runs it.

*There was a strongly expressed feeling by a majority of subjects that building leadership is ineffective in implementing the program. There was little difference on this subject between those who have stayed and those who have left. As far as major differences in the way those who left the district responded to the questions versus those who stayed, this researcher assumed that despite repeated assurances of anonymity, those who stayed would be reluctant to be critical of the district in any meaningful way. This was not the case. Both groups had strong feelings about certain aspects of the program and their building administrators' ability to work with the new-teacher induction program to produce meaningful learning experiences for the teachers while easing their entry into the profession and the district. Sixteen of 20 teachers interviewed had something negative to say regarding building administration in relation to the induction process. Eight of these responses came from those who had stayed, while eight came from those who had left.*

It's a mixed bag. My mentor was not a good match. I teach on the second floor and he teaches as far as he could away from me. And he coached and he was a drama teacher and director and he did choir. It was really close to impossible to get together unless we set up a separate time to meet. But stuff always got in the way. He tried very hard and I tried. But we had some great conversations...but it was really hit and miss. He was one year in this district. He tried to help me...it wasn't like he was dodging me but he didn't have time.

This response from Subject 18 reveals a common theme. There seemed to be little rhyme or reason at the building level in assigning mentor teachers to incoming educators. This would seem to be a key component to helping ease the transition to the school environment and in helping newer teachers become part of the school culture,

yet it sometimes seemed in the interviews as if the building administrators gave it little thought.

Subject 6 answered in the same vein when it came to mentor/mentee relationships and the district's expectations of early service teachers:

What do they expect of us? That's a good question. We have to have the first fifteen criteria of the portfolio. So I guess that would show that we're continuing education, that we are doing pre and post tests assessments, all those criteria. I feel pretty supported. Our instructional coach has really good information and supports us. I'm sure everyone's said that. As far as in the building, the actual mentor program we're supposed to have, the buddy teacher or whatever, yeah, there's really none of that. But even amongst new teacher they really support each other.

A common theme among a majority of the subjects was that the early service teachers themselves were a more effective and more practically successful support group for each other than the mentors they were assigned.

An indictment of building leadership came from Subject 15, who had left the district after one year and who is now successfully teaching in a large, affluent suburban district:

When you asked me about my mentor, I didn't have one. First three months I was there the mentor I was supposed to have couldn't do it because of his athletic duties. I was kinda (sic) lost in the shuffle, then it was like 'oh yeah, he needs someone to sign off on the paperwork, who do we get?' There wasn't a mentor. It was my peers, my fellow first year teachers.

Sensing that this instructor might have grown bitter through his experience in the district, the researcher asked the next question, which was focused on whether the subject perceived the feedback he received to be positive or negative while in the district. His answer was short and to the point, and added more credence to his critical

view of the district: “Positive. I was spoiled.” That someone who had been treated well would still feel negatively about a major part of the induction program was interesting.

Research Question Two asked what differences existed between those who had left the program and those who stayed. The overall answer was “very little”. There was no major difference apparent between the two groups. They were equally frustrated by their early days, and expressed equal amounts of admiration for the director of the program.

### Themes Found in the Study

The overall feeling that the researcher saw when analyzing the responses given was that, while the program was not the main reason that teachers decided to stay or leave, there remained a question as to whether it was accomplishing its *purpose*. The stated purpose of the program is to train teachers to be successful and to acclimate to the district. The program director also explicitly stated in the preliminary interview that the program was designed to help cut down on teacher attrition. The teachers interviewed for this study, many of whom are still in the program, seemed to see it as, at best, something from which they gleaned a little information but which did not translate to the building level well. At worst, a few saw it as a nuisance that had nothing to do with their daily lives. While almost all subjects saw the program director in a positive light, they all had trouble seeing how the program affected their daily teaching except in minor ways.

Overarching themes found in the study:

1. Subjects felt that there was little pedagogical change from the program.

2. Subjects did feel a positive influence in their understanding of the culture in which they worked.
3. Subjects did not believe it helped them acclimate to their building and, in fact, thought it hampered their efforts to know their place of work before school started.
4. There was a slight difference in tone between those who stayed and those who left, but only slight. There was some degree of frustration and some degree of acknowledgement of the program on both sides. Those who left were slightly more dismissive of the program and district.
5. While not every respondent expressed frustration with every aspect of the program, there was a feeling of frustration expressed by a vast majority of the subjects in the expectations placed on new teachers by the program.

Subject 4, who was one of the more experienced teachers interviewed, was of the opinion that the way in which things are introduced during the program should be changed to meet the needs of incoming first-year teachers.

That first week where you come in with other first year teachers for that training and we were all first year teachers, we've never taught before so we spent five days learning about cooperative learning strategies and Kagan Strategies...Honestly I think things like that are more beneficial now a few years down the road where you can start picking ideas that work in your classroom, but coming in new no one knew what the students were like or what your (sic) school was like. We were at the other high school so we didn't know what our classrooms were like or what we'd be teaching, how many kids do I (sic) have in a class, more...what would have been more beneficial would have been telling us more about our specific job in our building and having us over here with our administration so we weren't clueless for that week. That time could be used so much better that that first five days....

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated previously, one of the most profound issues public education faces is the learning gap between students in low socio-economic and high socio-economic school systems. One of the ways that poorer school districts can address this achievement gap is by stressing continuity in teaching staffs. This has been addressed in recent years through engaging incoming teachers in structured programs to induct them into the school community. Since statistics show that teachers do not reach their peak as instructors until between their fifth and eighth year teaching, it is contrary to the best interest of school districts to train teachers only to see them give their best years to another district. Unfortunately, the attrition rate for teachers in urban schools is over 50% in the first five years of teaching. Since poor urban students are already at greater risk of falling behind or dropping out, it is doubly important to keep good teachers in the classroom. It also makes sense that continuity in a teaching staff allows for continuity of vision in districts and individual school buildings. Many of the administrators who were preliminarily interviewed for this study expressed frustration at beginning big initiatives and getting everyone in the district up to speed only to see a large percentage of teachers leave and new ones take their places. These new teachers do not possess a full understanding of what the district is trying to accomplish or how. This led to a “two steps forward, one step back” feeling in the district much of the time.

Finding One of the study was there was little pedagogical change in teachers due to the induction program. This finding would seem to mesh with the findings of

Bradley and Loadman (2005) who stated that the money spent on teacher induction was not well spent. This finding goes against other literature consulted for this study, including that of Berry (2004) who believed teachers were inherently worth spending money on as they are invaluable resources.

Finding Two of the study was that teachers culturally felt more understanding of their students as a result of the program. This finding was most closely associated with the findings of the American Teacher survey (2008) showing that new teachers most wanted training that made them feel innovative and flexible on the job. Ng's (2003, 2006, 2007) studies of the problems of urban schools discussed the need to keep quality teachers in urban settings. This validates keeping this aspect of the program intact in that it helps keep teachers connected to the students they teach.

Finding Three of the study was that teachers expressed frustration at the lack of availability of their classrooms and schools to them in the days and weeks leading up to school starting. This again corresponds with the findings of the American Teacher (2008) study. This study found teachers wishing for more time to prepare for their year. There is also evidence in the literature that teachers are being asked to do more with less time. Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2005) discussed the importance of understanding teacher frustration and what makes teachers leave the profession. Bradley and Loadman (2005) addressed the need to understand the frustrations of time commitments that face new and experienced teachers. Boles and Troen (2005) stated, "Too often, teaching is described as a dead-end job with low status, uncompetitive salaries, and poor working conditions" (p. 6).

Finding Four dealt with the fact that there was only a slight difference in responses between the teachers who stayed and those who left the district. This would validate Bradley and Loadman (2005) in their belief that teacher induction programs do not give a good enough return on investment to be continued. Buckley et al. (2005) also addressed this issue in that teachers who leave education have a variety of reasons for doing so, dealing with money, working conditions, etc. That there is little difference in the statements of those who left or those who stayed may be an indicator that if the district is using this program to keep teachers, it is not working.

Finding Five was that there was little cooperation between building and district in the teacher induction process. This would seem to be in the same vein as studies by Buckley et al. (2005), Bradley and Loadman (2005), and Britton et al. (2005), who found that U.S. schools lack coherent approaches to induction, leading teachers to believe they are not appreciated.

The final finding of the study, Finding Six, was that building leadership is ineffective in implementing the district's program. This agrees with Findings Five and Three that show the implementation of the program and cooperation are lacking between building and district. This finding agrees clearly with Berry (2006) and Brown (2003). Berry decries the fact that little has been done to universally address the issue of teacher induction—that like most of our education policies, we have, to our detriment, relied on the local level. This has led to a hodge-podge of under-funded induction programs. Most are not monitored for quality, and most give results one would expect from such programs. Brown cites the use of mentoring programs as

cutting the attrition rate for new teachers by up to half. These mentoring programs, Brown goes on to say, have been hijacked recently by federal accountability standards, leading to a degrading of their quality.

If the problem of teacher turnover is to be attacked, and the results achieved used as a tool to attack the broader problem of student achievement in urban schools, there must be an understanding of how the teachers involved in the program perceive their situation. There must be a better understanding of perceived positives and negatives in any program aimed at their development. While it is not the sole reason that teachers stay or leave the district, induction is a key component the district uses in trying to slow teacher attrition. The question then arises, is the program meeting its stated purpose? The goal of this study was to help find an answer to this question from the perspective of the teachers involved. This chapter and the recommendations included in it are the final component in this attempt.

The findings in this study add to the body of research on improving workplace support for urban educators. A study by the U.S. Department of Education (2008) identified the preparation and retention of quality teachers as key components in improving student achievement. The Department of Education report also included key components to improving teaching. These included creating a supportive working environment for incoming teachers. Similar recommendations can be found in the literature surrounding teacher retention for the last twenty years (Haberman, 1987; Nieto, 2009)

This study describes one district's attempt to help its teachers become more acclimated to the district and to reach a comfort level more quickly. As stated before, the district developed this program with the help of early career educators. The district Professional Development Coordinator convened a committee to decide what the most important aspects of the first years of teaching were and what needed to be addressed with new teachers to maximize the chances of success, as well as increase the chances of teacher retention. The list that committee compiled included much the same material as the chapters covered by the new teacher manual for the district. While the subjects in the study varied in their responses from feeling there was little to no value in the program for them to feeling that it helped them tremendously, this study in no way advocates an abandonment of teacher induction. Instead, it is important to note the feelings of the teachers who are the target of the program. From this we can glean a direction that this program and others like it need to go to capture as many of the early career teachers participating in it as they can.

**Recommendation One:  
Integration of District and Building Induction Programs**

Research question one asked how the induction program at Triangle Hills shaped teacher growth according to the teachers involved in the study. Many of the teachers interviewed for this study expressed frustration at the lack of continuity between the district's induction philosophy and the way things were handled practically at the building level. Most of the subjects did not express feelings that the district's program was worthless or that it could not be effective, but they did express

feelings that there was a lack of communication and integration between what the expectations were from the district and from their individual buildings.

Often the expectations of teachers at the building level as to their daily procedures in class (lesson planning, objectives, student work, etc.) were in conflict with those being expressed by the induction program. The building administrators might expect teachers to be ready in the first week for a full walk-through of their room during a class, while the district program insisted the teachers sit through eight hours a day of meetings that did not have anything to do with curriculum or specifics of how to set up their classrooms. In other words, there was a quite severe disconnect between what the teachers felt was important and what was being presented to them at that moment. This inhibits growth, professional learning, and comfort.

If the program is to reach its stated goal, it must be integrated into the daily lives of the young teachers. It cannot be viewed as “tacked on” by the participants or its value will be diminished in the eyes of those who participate in it. This can be accomplished through better communication of the goals of the program and the value it brings to buildings from the district to the building administrations, and by more integration of the new teacher induction process into the daily lives of new teachers.

In this researcher’s opinion, this can be accomplished in the following manner:

1. The building administrators must be brought up to speed on the expectations of new teachers by the district. This can be accomplished through a series of short meetings or even by having the administrators participate in a round table discussion of the expectations and the need for any changes.

2. Teachers should participate in their early district induction for only a portion of each day, then return to their buildings to receive the remainder of their training on building specific matters. This would serve to introduce them earlier to their building leadership and serve to make the process more meaningful to them.
3. The importance of the program director's role should be made more clear to building administrators. If they are fully aware of the fact that the director is in charge of and is responsible for the training and success of new teachers, then the process should be much easier for them to understand at their level. They become facilitators for the director, and can be asked to do specific things in their building that they may not feel responsible for or that they need to do now.

#### Recommendation Two:

##### Improved Coordination Between Induction and Building Mentor Program.

Question One asks how the teacher program affects teacher growth in the areas of pedagogy, cultural awareness, and comfort in the building. One of the areas the induction program stresses is that of the mentor relationship and how it is key in connecting new teachers to the building. A common theme in many of the new teacher interviews was an inadequate mentor relationship. All teachers are to be assigned a mentor in the building in which they work when they begin their career in the district. Several teachers, as stated earlier, felt that they were not given a mentor that matched their needs. One subject pointed out that he taught social studies and did not coach, but he was given a Physical Education instructor and basketball coach as a mentor. One teacher and his mentor worked on opposite sides of the building from each other and

only saw each other in staff meetings. Still another new teacher was assigned a second-year teacher as a mentor. This relationship is important and could be an informal “buddy” relationship, but a second-year teacher has no business mentoring a first-year teacher while the second year teacher is still learning the ropes of teaching. These are problems that are created by either a lack of attention to the importance of mentors on the part of the building administration or a lack of time to adequately pair new teachers with suitable mentors; however, the district induction program should have oversight of this and make sure it does not happen. One of the major factors in keeping teachers from leaving a district is the forming of relationships. The mentor relationship is one of the first that a young teacher can make in a school district. Well trained, suitable mentors with a background or teaching area similar to that of the new teachers would seem to be a necessity.

The first area of improvement in gaining adequate mentor relationships is to match up teaching areas and times of day that are available to each person. Second is to more fully evaluate who is interested in becoming a mentor teacher and evaluate them as a potential mentor. Finally, prospective mentors could be assessed using a personality inventory in which interests and background are taken into account. The literature on the subject, including studies done by Brown (2003), Sachs (2006) and Berry (2004) shows that mentor relationships can be key to successful early career adjustments for teachers. This lends credence to the idea that mentoring is an important enough aspect of induction to continue to fund it.

Recommendation Three:  
The District Should Tailor the Induction Program to the Needs of  
Different New Teachers.

One of the research questions posed was the differences between those who had stayed and those who had left in the way they approached the questions posed. Once the interviews were underway, it became apparent that the more veteran the teacher, the more they felt neglected by the program. “New teacher” is a vague term and, in the district, encompasses teachers who are in their first three to four years of teaching. When statistics bear out that the district loses many teachers in their fourth or fifth year, a support system to continue helping teachers who might be considered to be transitioning from new to “young veteran” status would seem to make sense. In this case, using the fourth and fifth year teachers as experts in the new teacher program and asking them to share their experiences with new teachers might help to keep them connected and add to the feeling that they are important contributors in the process. This would not have to be in addition to the things that are being asked of new teachers. Fifth year teachers are not a part of the program at this point, but could be made to feel incredibly important to its success by being asked to continue in a limited and quite possibly paid way to be a part of it. Who else is closer to the experience of the new teachers than those who have just gone through the process and successfully survived it?

Also, there are many teachers hired every year, by urban and non-urban schools alike, who are entering the profession “cold” with alternative certification and no practical idea of what to expect. Four of the alternatively certificated teachers talked

of being “lost” the first few weeks and simply “surviving.” They felt some of the things that they were being presented as new teachers were over their heads, specifically the portfolio element, which was something they were not concerned with in comparison to simply understanding what was expected of them as a teacher.

On the other hand, all of the subjects who had gone through traditional education training expressed some degree of frustration over being asked to “repeat” things that they had done during their college teacher education program. It seems reasonable to separate these two groups and have leaders who share some common experiences with these new teachers. Teachers who are in the “young veteran” stage and have come from alternative backgrounds could help the transition of new teachers from the same backgrounds by sharing their experiences as presenters or mentors in the program.

#### Recommendation Four: Refocusing on what is Important to New Teachers

This recommendation stems from answers given focusing on Research Question One, and specifically the sub-question dealing with the overall familiarity and comfort of the new teachers with their buildings. Despite the fact that the program was started to help new teachers, it was stated repeatedly by the subjects that they felt very overwhelmed their first year in the district. If this is the case, the program needs to adjust itself to help these teachers and take the pressure off them.

New teachers are almost always overwhelmed, and often this leads to stress for students as well as the teacher. The subjects in this study asked for more help. They

should be given mentors who know their subject and who know classroom management. They, then, should be given adequate time to meet with, share experiences with, and to observe each other.

The district should re-examine the way they handle the first days of teacher training before school starts. These days could be used to help new teachers ready their classrooms, to give them practice scenarios to help with classroom management, and to help them prepare their first-quarter lesson plans. These were all things that the study subjects felt were ultimately important and that they would be judged on. Instead they were in a classroom setting learning procedures at the district level. If this information has to be given before school starts, it could be presented a week earlier. While this recommendation would be costly to the district, it is more costly, not only in training funds but also in lost experience, to keep doing what has not been overly successful.

At a relatively small cost in the overall budget of the district, new teachers could be brought in at the same time on a half day basis at the district and a half day basis at the building level to learn the overall culture of the district and their building. They could meet mentor teachers, who could be expected as a part of their stipend to attend and get to know their mentees early on.

Much of what is considered to be district level information could be given to teachers later in the program while the early information was focused on getting to know the profile of the district's students, the experience of the district's teachers, and the day to day work the teachers can expect to perform without overwhelming them.

Urban schools struggle to retain teachers. Teachers choose to leave for many reasons, from working conditions to pay, from proximity to home to feelings of helplessness. Urban districts like Triangle Hills have invested large sums in trying to stem this flow. In studying a representative group which is immersed in a program designed to help retain them, a mixed message is received from the teachers. They believe that the district, especially the person in charge of the program, wants to help them. They do not believe the buildings, which are overwhelmed with the day-to-day business of trying to teach their population, are as involved with the process as they should be. They feel that the program sometimes focuses on things that are not as important to them as teachers as are some things that are not covered or only touched upon.

This researcher strongly recommends that the district take into consideration the things the teachers reported honestly in their assessment. If the district hopes to capture a higher percentage of teachers for their career, its leaders must be sensitive to the feelings and perceptions of their most costly resource—teachers.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

While this study is limited in its scope, it seems to invite a broader study of young educators who have participated in induction programs like this one. A case study of larger proportions might give a truer picture of the feelings of young teachers about these programs.

A comparative analysis of district retention in districts that have these types of programs versus those who do little or no induction could also be productive. If there is

little difference in retention rates, then what is the benefit of the program? Induction would have to be rethought and redesigned to better meet the needs of young teachers.

Also, this study could be replicated with a representative group of elementary teachers, as this group's daily work experience and outlook is often quite different from that of middle- or high-school teachers.

Finally, a similar study focusing on teacher pre-service training would be both interesting and valuable. Focusing on one school district, a researcher might look at how a representative group of young teachers broke down in regard to their teacher preparation. This group could be interviewed upon entering the profession and again at the end of their first year to see where they perceived the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher preparation program at the college level to be. They could be compared to a control group of alternatively certified teachers. Just as districts can never be satisfied with how they induct teachers until they keep a large majority of those hired, higher education cannot be satisfied until it sees a significantly higher retention rate of traditionally trained "professional" educators in comparison to those who alternatively enter the profession.

Public education is under scrutiny from all quarters. Even though most districts are inadequately funded, teachers are under constant pressure to improve standardized test scores at all costs, and working conditions are poor in most urban schools, districts and administrators are asked to hold onto good teachers and convince more to come to their schools. This is an Olympian task. Further study is crucial to find the best ways to hire and keep good instructors. This study is but one small step in that process. The last

three years have given this researcher great insight into how his young colleagues think. As a whole, they believe strongly in what they have chosen to do. That belief must be reinforced by listening to them and responding to their needs. This researcher's hope is that, in some small way, he has contributed to this important area of research.

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