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My purpose in this study was to examine the roles principals play in supporting beginning teachers (BTs) in their first 3 years in the classroom in urban characteristic school districts. Previous research has found that many new teachers leave the profession within their first 3-5 years. Many BTs find that the job demands are too burdensome, that they lack autonomy and discretion, and that they lack influence over school-wide decisions that impact teachers. Some leave due to low pay and poor working conditions. Others leave from a lack of support from administrators and colleagues. Bettini and Park (2021) suggest that “states consider whether their administrator licensure programs adequately prepare school principals to cultivate positive school cultures and provide instructional support for novices in high-poverty urban schools” (p. 25).

The findings from my study add to the literature on skills, strategies, and tools that principals can use to maintain a positive culture for beginning teachers that fosters high expectations for our urban schools. Using basic qualitative research methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I examined the experiences of 5 elementary principals who are currently serving or have served in urban-characteristic school settings. The principals identified 5 themes that reflected their experiences of supporting beginning teachers in these urban schools. During their semi-structured interviews with me, the principals candidly shared their thoughts and ideas on how to best support beginning teachers in our most hard-to-staff schools. My findings add another dimension of learning for current and future principals through the recommendations provided in the conclusion.

This research reminded me of how overwhelming beginning experiences can be for new teachers. As a former administrator, I caution current and future principals to strategically organize the responsibilities of beginning teachers. My research highlights the intentionality of acclimating BTs to the culture and climate of the school coupled with professional learning communities, social justice, and equity. Bettini and Park (2021) suggest that “to retain teachers in high-poverty schools for longer, states should consider incorporating strategies to improve school social contexts into equity plans” (p. 25). The findings from my study may provide information that principals can use to better support beginning teachers in elementary urban school settings, resulting in decreased teacher turnover and strong educational experiences for teachers and students. The principal’s role is to lay the groundwork that is most conducive to student achievement and professional growth for teachers and staff.

BEGINNING TEACHER SUPPORT IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTINGS:
EXAMINING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLES

by

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Dr. Craig Peck
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DEDICATION

To my daughter Kai Britt Jowers, my heartbeat and my motivation. You are the reason why I persevere, and your unconditional love is the reason why I do what I do. The stars aligned, and God saw fit for us to be together as mother and daughter. Let's take on the world, baby girl!

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I have always had an innate desire to coach and mentor people around me. Because I had a strong foundational support system through my family, friends, mentors, and church family, my passion has been to help others reach their goals. As a teacher, this level of support was no different for me. My former principal was a strong mentor and building block for my educational career. Therefore, it is grounded in me to extend that same assistance to beginning teachers entering education. What began as a sincere passion soon became a sore spot for me. As a principal, I had difficulty retaining beginning teachers in my building. I serve as principal in a small, urban, Title I school. This district and school are very diverse and can be challenging at times. I assumed that every beginning teacher would embrace the challenge of educating students and families who face socioeconomic issues, similarly to how I once embraced this challenge as a beginning teacher. I was so mistaken, broken-hearted, and frustrated, but yet determined to delve deeper into this issue of teacher/principal relationships and the supporting roles we, as principals, can take in grooming our most impressionable educators.

Another reason that motivated me to engage in this research project is my 8-year-old daughter. I only want the best for her. Fortunately, I have the resources to ensure she receives the best education possible. However, her friends' parents may be limited in what they know and the resources to utilize to be the best advocate for their children. My responsibility is to stand in the gap for those parents and other children who may not have a voice.

As a 16-year veteran principal in the leadership field, my anxiety and stress levels still kick into high gear when I have to find the most qualified individuals from a scarce pool of teaching applicants. Although finding new teachers is a team effort among the principal, veteran teachers, and staff, it is ultimately my responsibility to find the "right fit." During the interview

process, I must identify if the potential candidate believes in our school's vision and mission, will mesh with the teammates who already serve on a particular grade level and the school's culture, and genuinely desire to serve our student population. This person should come with some knowledge of classroom management and instruction and be coachable and willing to learn.

My goal through this study was to contribute to the existing research that concerns building capacity among our beginning teachers (BTs) in urban, hard-to-staff schools and the supporting roles administrators take with our BTs.

Problem Statement

We have all heard the cliché, “leaders are not born, but made.” Although this statement is widely accepted, Amanchukwu et al. (2015) contend that “a good leader must have experience, knowledge, commitment, patience, and most importantly the skills to negotiate and work with others to achieve goals” (p. 6). Experienced teachers and principals are leaders in their respective roles, including supporting beginning teachers. Linda Tillman (2005) explain how school leaders can best support beginning teachers and decrease teacher attrition. du Plessis and Sunde (2017) describe the perception that beginning teachers, in general, are not prepared for what awaits them in the workforce, which directly influences their principals' leadership styles and decisions. Key factors that affect BTs in urban schools include low teacher pay, lack of resources, poor working conditions, lack of professional development to assist in classroom management, building relationships, weak induction and mentoring programs, and last, but not least, lack of support from administration or their principals.

Public school teachers in the U.S. face significant challenges meeting the needs of so many diverse learners. According to the 2012 U.S. Bureau of the Census, elementary and

secondary teaching is the largest occupation in the U.S., and teacher compensation is the largest item in school district budgets. In their 2014 study, Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey concluded with three key findings regarding the dynamics of the teaching force:

- The teaching force has become larger, dramatically increasing in size and growing at over twice the student enrollment rate.
- The teaching force is less experienced. Teachers in high need schools are often not prepared to teach diverse students and bring with them attitudes and biases that negatively impact student success. In their account, Cochran-Smith and Power (2010) identified a “teacher-quality gap” whereby “schools with large numbers of poor and minority students are most likely to have teachers who are inexperienced, teaching in areas outside their fields, or otherwise unqualified” (p. 8).
- The teaching force is more diverse. Whereas the teaching force in the U.S. was reported as “increasingly White, monolingual, middle class, and female, while the student population is increasingly diverse” (Banks & Banks, 2000; Gay & Howard, 2000), growth in the number of minority teachers have outpaced growth in minority students and has been more than twice the growth rate of White teachers.

In the past 25 years, while the teaching force has grown, there has not been an equal distribution of types of teachers across types of schools and locations. The teaching force in high-poverty areas (where more than 75% of students are on free or reduced-price lunch) grew by nearly 325%. In contrast, the number of teachers employed in low-poverty public schools (where less than one third are on free/reduced-price lunch) declined by one fifth. By 2011-2012, high and mid-poverty public schools employed over two thirds of all public school teachers.

While the socioeconomic status of families and communities shifts, diversity is increasing, and so are the experience levels of the teaching force. Research tells us that the number of beginning teachers (with less than 5 years of experience) increased to 43% from 22% between 1997-1998 and 2011-2012. As expected, those schools with the greatest hiring needs gained more beginning teachers. Between 1997-1998 and 2011-2012, the number of beginning teachers in high-poverty schools increased from 41,000 to 189,400. Thus, in 2011-2012, there were over four times as many BTs in high-poverty schools than in 1997-1998.

Critics have long debated whether a teacher's performance improves with each additional year in the classroom (Crowe, 2010; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Paulson & Marchant, 2012); however, most accept that classroom experience plays an important role in the quality of teaching and learning. Studies support the idea that growth in teaching knowledge and skills individuals acquire increases significantly through their first several years in the classroom (Henry et al., 2012; Kane et al., 2008). Moreover, researchers argue that teacher experience is just as important as a resource that is not equally allocated (Oakes, 1990; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005a, 2005b).

Making matters worse, data analysis from the 2012-2013 Teacher Follow-up Survey reports that almost one in 10 teachers in high-poverty, urban public schools left the profession (Goldring et al., 2014). Studies also show that high-poverty, high-minority urban and rural public schools have the highest turnover rates (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Existing studies and accompanying statistics demonstrate that attracting and retaining beginning teachers is a struggle in high-poverty, urban school communities with a more diverse student population. Diversity in this context covers many facets, such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomics. Thus, the students most in need—those in low-income, high-poverty, or urban

areas and communities—are often taught by the least experienced teachers. In response, most districts and governmental institutions cannot afford to turn these beginning teachers away but instead must train, support, and retain beginning teachers, so they become quality teachers who remain in hard-to-staff schools. Therefore, there is a great focus to be placed on attracting and retaining teachers in urban education and diversity in teacher preparation.

The research defines support for beginning teachers in various ways. North Carolina defines its beginning teachers as those with fewer than 3 years of teaching experience (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2018). Their support systems can range from small class sizes to strong, effective mentorship to opportunities for monthly professional development that will enhance their craft and build upon their understanding of the curriculum. Beginning teacher support is a topic on which many states and school districts place special emphasis.

As a former principal who served in a diverse school and community and now works in a central office support role for a small urban district, supporting teachers, especially beginning teachers, is a high priority. Researchers such as Reid (2015), Ingersoll and Strong (2011), Darling-Hammond (2003), and Tillman (2005) contend that there are still other factors surrounding mentoring and induction programs that play an integral part in influencing teachers' likeliness to remain in the classroom. These factors include but are not limited to school culture, school leadership, teacher-mentor quality and relationships, and salary. Indeed, a “discussion of mentoring cannot be complete without including the principal” (Worthy, 2005, p. 395).

Research Purpose

My purpose in this study was to examine the roles principals play in supporting beginning teachers (BTs) in their first 3 years in the classroom in urban characteristic school

districts. Previous research has found that many new teachers leave the profession within their first 3-5 years. Many BTs find the job's demands too burdensome, lack autonomy and discretion, and lack influence over school-wide decisions that impact teachers. Some leave due to low pay and poor working conditions. Others leave from a lack of support from administrators and colleagues (Ingersoll, 2001).

There are specific strategies noted in the research literature for principals to implement best supports and practices for their beginning teachers (Bettini & Park, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2003; NCDPI, 2018; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The principal is a key player in these practices. A principal's support is necessary and evident in various stages of a beginning teacher's journey, such as in the recruitment phase and guiding the BT in gaining cultural and racial awareness of the student and community populations. Other supports that principals provide manifest in professional learning communities (PLCs), instruction, mentorship, and induction programs. My research project was intended to equip principals with the strategies to maintain, nurture, coach, and support our beginning teachers.

Indicative of the challenges that face many beginning teachers, Katie Mgongolwa (2014) describes her constant struggle to stay afloat as a North Carolinian teacher:

I am 29 years old. I earned my bachelor's degree at the University of North Carolina; I got my start in the local schools. When I think about the people who made a difference in my life, I think mainly about my teachers. My third-grade teacher, who said I could be good at math even though I couldn't believe it. My fifth-grade teacher, whose unending kindness and love of travel inspired me to become a teacher and teach abroad. My middle school math teacher, who tutored me and cared about me, and never gave up on me. I am qualified, a good teacher, and passionate about education, but I am at the tipping point. I

am not the only one. In fact, I am just one of many voices aching to be heard, to be noticed, to be cared for by our governing bodies. They say when an airplane is in distress, that you should put your oxygen mask on first before helping others around you.

Teachers have a long history of ignoring this and prioritizing others first. But eventually, we run out of breath and have to put our own mask on to survive. I deeply hope North Carolina hears our voices and rights the plane before we crash. (p. 3)

Principals like myself cannot afford to lose highly qualified and effective teachers like Katie. How do we reshape or rewrite our roles in ways that can contribute to a beginning teacher's success in the classroom and the educational field in urban characteristic, high-need schools? Teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon. Consistent with related empirical research, several factors contribute to this turnover. As a school principal in an urban school setting, one of those factors rests on my shoulders: support for beginning teachers. Tillman (2005) noted, "The links between student achievement and teacher competence cannot be understated, and urban principals must consider the impact of frequent turnover of teachers on the stability of the school community" (p. 625). I also share Tillman's (2005) beliefs that "principals should be actively involved in mentoring 1st-year teachers" (p. 625) and "in the urban school context, the principal's role in mentoring beginning teachers is critical as it relates to their retention and development of professional and personal competence" (p. 613).

Research Question

In my research study, I asked, "*How do principals prepare and support beginning teachers in urban characteristic school settings?*" Through this research question, I sought to examine the principal's role in guiding a beginning teacher's educational journey during their first 3 years in a high-poverty, city-based school setting.

Background Context

What is Urban?

In the U.S., there are roughly 100,000 fewer teachers than needed each school year (Sutcher et al., 2016). The “revolving door” of beginning teachers is amplified by new teachers being placed in our hardest-to-staff schools in high-poverty, urban communities where one-third to one-half of teachers leave within their first 5 years (Barnes et al., 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Richard Milner’s (2012) research vividly depicts how the term “urban” is often misused to describe “struggling schools” or schools that are nestled in poor communities or neighborhoods whose residents are primarily of color. Milner described his visit to a school district, which he clearly recognized as rural (amid trees, unoccupied space, and farmland). However, the school officials connected the status or characteristics of race (mainly Black and Mexican people) and socioeconomic context (low-income housing and factory-based work) of the schools (which had low test scores, lack of motivation, and disciplinary problems) to what they believed and understood as “urban.” Too often, Milner (2012) noted, we “classify schools as urban because of the perceived shortcomings of students and parents in the school” (p. 47).

Milner (2012) suggests that if we “construct knowledge through common language and definitional categorization about ‘urban schools’ and districts” (p. 47), it will allow us to advance the field better. Milner (2012) suggests three categories of urban:

- *Urban Intensive*—Reflects the size and density of a particular locale. New York, Chicago, and Atlanta (where populations are more than 1 million people) would be described as urban intensive. In these types of environments, the infrastructure and large numbers of people make it difficult to access necessary and adequate resources

for large numbers of people; outside of school, factors such as housing, poverty, and transportation are directly connected to what happens inside of the school.

- *Urban Emergent*—Describes large cities, but not as large as major cities identified in the urban-intensive category; population size is usually less than 1 million people. These cities encounter some of the same scarcity of resource problems but on a smaller scale. Examples may include Charlotte, North Carolina, or Austin, Texas.
- *Urban Characteristic*—These settings are typically characterized as small cities and towns. Challenges of this category may include an increase of English language learners, less credentialed teachers, large classroom sizes, diverse student populations, and challenges associated with socioeconomic status. These schools may be located in rural or even suburban districts, but the outside-of-school environments are not as large as those in the urban intensive or urban emergent schools.

I focused on urban-characteristic schools and communities for this research, noting that all three categories Milner (2012) originally identified share very similar elements. My task was to research the principal's role in supporting beginning teachers in their first 3 years in the classroom, particularly in urban characteristic public schools, similar to the school where I previously served as principal. I sought to build upon existing research to further educate and equip public school principals with tools and strategies to support beginning teachers in these types of school systems.

Brief Description of Methods

I used basic qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to examine the role(s) principals play in supporting beginning teachers (BTs) in their first 3 years in the classroom in urban-characteristic schools. I narrowed my focus to a school district in the Piedmont Triad area

of North Carolina. Upon receiving approval from the school district, I identified principals using the district's directory to make initial contact and solicit participants from urban elementary schools. Five administrators volunteered to participate in my study. Next, I scheduled virtual interviews to be conducted via Google Meet. These semi-structured interviews allowed for extensive and in-depth conversations about how they support their beginning teachers. The interviews were recorded and sent to a reputable company to be transcribed. Data were collected by taking notes during the online discussions and recordings of semi-structured interviews. I explain my study methods in more detail in Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

Each member of a school building has a role to play in education. The principal is placed in a building to be a leader. The teacher is hired to teach the curriculum. Students are the customers or consumers of education, and their role is to learn and build upon that learning to matriculate to the next level to reach high school graduation. Biddle (1986) described role theory as one's experiences in and responses to an environment shaped by interaction among personal factors such as identity and knowledge and social contexts like relationships, cultural norms, and social capital.

Kikuchi and Coleman (2012) positioned their theory of social capital alongside Coleman's (1998) theory as the resources inherent in social network, such as a school.

Social capital is the "resources that exist in social relations between individuals" (Curry & Holter, 2015, p. 9), and social capital theory posits that the "structure of relations" between and among individuals is a resource that contributes to how individuals and organizations pursue individual and collective aims (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). (Bettini & Park, 2021, p. 6)

Therefore, my conceptual framework follows the lead of Bettini and Park (2021) in combining social capital theory (Curry & Holter, 2015) and role theory (Biddle, 1986). It is at this intersection that I research and analyze the principal's role in supporting beginning teachers in urban school settings. By intertwining social capital theory with role theory, we can identify and understand why it is often difficult for beginning or novice teachers to find their own place among those who already exist in school culture. The principal is the key person in ensuring that the beginning teacher is properly equipped with the tools to “[make] sense’ (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1520) of their roles, through interactions among their personal characteristics, and their social contexts, while they are building social capital with their students, families, and colleagues” (Bettini & Park, 2021, p. 6) to achieve their professional goals during the first three years of beginning teaching and beyond.

Researcher Experience

At the onset of my study, I served as an elementary school principal and a middle school assistant principal. Months into a new school year, I transitioned to a district level position as the Special Programs Coordinator where I supervised the Academically/Intellectually Gifted program (AIG), English as a Second Language program (ESL), and Homebound Services. After serving as the coordinator for 5 months, I accepted the position as the Accountability Director for the district for which I currently serve.

I have served as a public-school administrator for over 20 years. Eleven of those years have been in urban elementary and middle schools. As an elementary school principal, one of the most challenging roles was hiring new teachers to join our elementary family. Each spring, as the hiring season approached, the anxiety of finding the “right fit” for our school was a huge responsibility for all stakeholders—the administrative team, mentor teachers, students, and the

beginning teacher(s). Upon hiring my new and beginning teachers, I typically plan a special time to welcome them to our school family. Usually, during a luncheon with my new teachers and their mentors, I discuss my expectations and the school's vision, mission, and culture. Even before being hired, most new and beginning teachers have already researched our school and are aware of the school culture they are joining.

I was in a district where principals were charged to meet with each BT and any other new teacher in their building (beginning or veteran) at least three times a month for 30-minute sessions. The principals were to highlight or discuss any happenings, deadlines, and expectations for that month, document the meeting, and submit the documentation to the superintendent. These meetings were in addition to the required three formal observations and summative evaluations per year of BTs (years 1-3). In an informal chat among my colleagues, one principal stated, "While time was a huge factor in accomplishing this task, it proved to be well worth the relationship-building piece that is so crucial to retaining good teachers." The principals also stated that while turnover improved some, they still had to hire at least four or more teachers for the upcoming school year. They stated that they understood and respected the rationale, but it (teacher turnover) still happened at a high rate due to the area of the urban community and the challenges it faces.

As a principal team, we depended on and supported each other during this time. While we understood how beneficial these meetings could be, they were also time-consuming and demanding. It was a balancing act of weighing the importance of support for beginning teachers with the daily demands of running a school. Therefore, I found myself seeking support as a principal from my colleagues. Where was the research and support for what principals needed to maintain a positive school climate and morale while educating children and giving beginning

teachers what they needed to succeed? Surrounded by larger school districts with better pay and the option of not serving in an urban setting, we consistently battled teacher turnover. People often refer to our district as a pitstop for educators to gain a little knowledge and experience and then leave for greener pastures. The principals and other administrators in this district work hard each day to demystify this perception. These thoughts and desires motivated me to research this topic and continue to gain the tools and knowledge from my principal friends and colleagues.

Significance of the Study

Perhaps principals have greater power and influence than they realize when addressing beginning teacher satisfaction and retention. Being aware of the levels of support necessary for novice teachers is a necessary component of attracting and retaining teachers to our “hard-to-staff schools.” Therefore, further research is needed to “identify specific leadership styles and practices of principals who most effectively promote teacher retention” (Wynn et al., 2007, p. 224), particularly in urban-characteristic schools. “Most principals are hired without skills to nurture novice teachers effectively” (Menchaca, 2003, p. 25). Most school leaders admit that they expect the universities’ beginning teacher programs to equip and prepare graduate teachers fully. Some doubt the preparedness of beginning teachers and state that “schools were forced to take full responsibility for preparing beginning teachers for their positions” (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017, p. 142). Therefore, districts and principals must work collaboratively to build programs necessary to develop and maintain effective principals. Additionally, effective school leaders should be developing the people in their buildings because the work of schools is achieved through the efforts of teachers who work directly with children (Bettini & Park, 2021; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Likewise, support and professional development are critical components in developing our youngest educators. Ensuring that new principals have effective, structured, and formalized training and continuous preparation in supporting teachers is necessary for creating and maintaining working conditions conducive to teacher retention (Reid, 2015). “Losing a good teacher—whether to another profession or to the school across town—means losing that teacher’s familiarity with school practices; experience with the school’s curriculum; and involvement with students, parents, and colleagues” (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003b, p. 21).

Preview of Chapters

In Chapter II, I review research related to the avenues through which beginning teachers ventured during their first few years as classroom teachers. I discuss studies related to the building blocks that principals must establish to help support the beginning teacher’s journey, including school culture, learning communities, workload, beginning teacher induction programs, mentors, feedback, communication, visibility, and critical reflection. Not only do these facets fit together to serve as a support system for our teachers, but the principal is also the key player in putting all of these pieces in place while cultivating a newfound mentorship with the beginning teachers in hopes of defying the odds of losing the BT after the first 3 years.

In Chapter III, I further explain the basic qualitative research approach I used to examine the role principals play in establishing various avenues or building blocks to support beginning teachers in the urban classroom. In Chapter IV, I offer the findings of my research. I profile the schools and principals and present central themes that emerged from my interviews with the participants. Finally, in Chapter V, I revisit and answer my research question by describing the roles that principals play in supporting beginning teachers. I analyze my findings by connecting

them to existing research. I conclude by sharing the implications of my study while offering recommendations for future practice and future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Darling-Hammond (2015) and Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) note that a school's leadership style influences its ambiance and atmosphere. School leaders construct the space where beginning teachers take the first step in their professional careers and determine whether beginning teachers are prepared for success. Research informs us that beginning teachers seem to value a principal who provides direction but at the same time does not stifle them. "Great school leaders create nurturing school environments in which accomplished teaching can flourish and grow" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 13). Principals who recognize that beginning teachers can exercise sound professional judgment and stand by to offer support when needed are seen as essential (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

In this chapter, I review existing research on this topic. First, I discuss themes and concepts that scholars have established regarding beginning teachers' early years and how the principal has historically played a role in supporting them. Next, I describe how and why the principal becomes a major player in the beginning teacher's first three years. In the final section, I describe how beginning teachers benefit from induction or training programs and mentoring.

Building Blocks for Beginning Teachers and the Role(s) Principals Play

Kathleen Brown and Susan Wynn (2009) are notable researchers on teacher recruitment and retention. They state, "research confirms that a number of working conditions, including teacher autonomy, class size, and a collegial atmosphere are main factors predicting high teacher morale and are decisive factors related to success in recruitment and retention" (p. 6). They also assert that, while principals search for the "right fit or person" for their school, beginning teachers and interviewees are also interviewing principals to find the "right fit" for themselves. Both beginning teachers and principals must be intentional about blending their fundamental

beliefs of schooling and education. Principals must find candidates who believe in their school's vision and mission. Likewise, candidates should search for schools that complement their core education values. Wynn et al. (2007) explain, "Findings from a recent survey of beginning teachers in a small urban district suggest that beginning teachers' decisions to remain at the school site are strongly influenced by principal leadership and school climate" (p. 209).

Based on my review of literature, I discovered several essential aspects of supporting beginning teachers, including school culture and climate; building learning communities; workload; beginning teacher induction or training programs; mentors; feedback, communication, and accessibility; social justice; and critical reflection. I review the literature related to these topics in the following pages.

School Culture/Climate

Attitudes and behaviors of the staff and students towards instruction and learning are exhibited through the school's culture or climate. Questions teachers ask about school culture include queries like: Who are we? What are we about? What influences our learning? Other factors include the vision and mission statements, teacher expectations, and opportunities for students and families.

School culture is defined as who or what a school is about, the beliefs of the people the school embodies, the traditions they protect, and the heart of who the school body is. The success of new teachers seems to be related to the school culture in which their first experiences as beginning teachers take place. In this, the principal plays a pivotal role. School leadership as the fulcrum for organizational climate and socialization sets the tone for the beginner's first experience ... largely through the assistance and monitoring of the principal. (Angelle, 2006, p. 319)

Research shows that similar to my own approaches I used as a school leader, principals are typically very strategic in choosing teachers who will support one another, who will work together, and who will act as an extension of the family (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Ingersoll et al., 2018). Principals must be intentional in making the proper placements and nurturing teacher bonds. The leader must model and teach veteran teachers how to wrap their arms around these people and support them (BTs); principals and veteran staff alike should welcome their ideas and leadership. “This family-like atmosphere motivates and helps new teachers feel positive about being at their school site” (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 48).

Research confirms how school culture plays an integral role in a beginning teacher’s decision to remain at the same school for several years. Johnson and Birkeland (2003a) tracked 50 first- and second-year teachers in Massachusetts. They found that “the ‘stayers’ characterized their schools as ‘integrated professional cultures’ that were ‘organized to engage teachers of all experience levels in collegial and collaborative efforts’” (p. 605). Teachers in another study reported that “the respect and support of administrators were key to their satisfaction” (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 44).

The school’s culture often mimics that of the community in which it is positioned. Therefore, the school may be a miniature replica of the community. Often, in urban communities and the schools that serve them, poverty is high, socioeconomic status is low, and there is a high number of Black and Hispanic students. There are additional challenges for a beginning teacher compared to a teacher in a middle or high socioeconomic status community and school. There may be barriers such as language, diverse backgrounds, distinct norms, values, and traditions, and risk of academic failure (Milner, 2012; Tillman, 2005). These hurdles can cause an enormous amount of stress and feelings of defeat for beginning teachers if they do not have

similar experiences, backgrounds, or cultural diversity training in how to navigate these barriers to, in essence, build relationships with the children and ultimately educate them successfully for a school year (Tillman, 2005). So, imagine how the school's culture can swallow up a new teacher if the principal and other supporting staff are not equipping them to balance all of the culture's facets. In addition to culture and its components, a beginning teacher must learn how to engage in conversations with their colleagues when planning and preparing for lessons, diving into the curriculum, and gathering and analyzing student data (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Wynn et al., 2007).

Tillman (2005) suggests that the principal in urban settings must go "beyond the traditional role as a manager and instructional leader to a more transformative and collaborative style of leadership" (p. 623). To be collaborative, a principal may ensure that beginning teachers' voices are heard, and they are active participants in every decision in which a veteran teacher may be involved. These approaches reflect an "ethno-humanist" style of leadership, which was first described by Lomotey (1993). In his study, Lomotey (1993) identified three qualities shared by some African American principals in predominantly African American schools: a commitment to educating all students, confidence that all students could achieve academically, and compassion for and understanding of all students and their communities. According to Lomotey, African American principals who adopt an ethno-humanist role identity are concerned with students' progress from grade to grade and their life chances.

The principal in Tillman's (2005) study, who was White, often referred to his compassion for the students and their families and insisted that he understood factors that affected their communities. In addition, he was concerned about the students' life chances in the larger society. A belief that principals can lead in transformative ways that help shape teachers' beliefs and

behaviors, change the culture of the educational environment, and enhance the social, emotional, and academic achievement of all students is important. The principal had the opportunity to promote change by making explicit his leadership plan for the school—a plan that would focus on the education of all students. Building on his beliefs about the value of all students, he also had an opportunity to mentor a first-year teacher to adopt a transformative philosophy of teaching and learning, specifically in the urban context.

Building Learning Communities

Building learning communities is an important piece of new teacher support through which principals can lay a strong foundation. Researchers often refer to learning communities as professional learning communities (PLCs). An effective professional learning community is an extension of the school's vision and mission statements. It is a part of the school's culture from which all teachers prosper, both veteran and new. "All teachers benefit from pleasant and collegial work environments, professional standards, and the development of a shared language around a common mission" (Scherer, 2003, p. 33). With discussions focused on "shared leadership, values, and vision, collective learning and application of learning" (Wynn et al., 2007, p. 212), learning communities are a platform by which beginning teachers will feel supported by their colleagues in their grade level during planning time, beginning teacher support groups both in the school and district settings, and again, with simple one-on-one interaction with the principal. The principal can intentionally set the stage for this platform to be a successful one by providing some degree of structure, such as a planning guide or template to guide conversations so as not to turn into a "to-do checklist" (make 90 copies of this paper, call this venue to schedule this field trip, etc.).

While the previously mentioned examples are important, they should not monopolize this sacred planning and collaborative time. Many administrative teams also join in on these PLC meetings. They may share the load and divide grade levels, thus making themselves available to assist, answer questions, and be visible to the teachers. The principal also has the resources to carve out additional PLC time within the school day, so beginning and veteran teachers do not have to remain after school for additional planning. One beginning teacher shared her overwhelming experience, explaining,

I worked at school from 7 in the morning until half-past 6 at night. At night, I would prepare my lessons. I was used to working hard in my previous career, but as a teacher, you have to do so many new things and carry such a high responsibility ... I have never been so tired in my entire life. (Gaikhorst et al., 2017, p. 52)

Brown and Wynn (2009) also interviewed principals about the support they believe should be in place for beginning teachers. Principals spoke about collective inquiry and the importance of nurturing a positive, energetic, cohesive network of learners that share ideas and make decisions for the whole (not individual agendas). One principal noted, “It’s not just the kids learning; we’re learning more and more all the time in order to keep up with our skills and our trade” (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 56). It is also important to note here that our beginning teachers are important resources and assets for our schools. Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) suggest that “we embrace individuality of style and judgment as much as we do collaboration” (p. 333).

Another participant specified the need for the principals’ leadership styles to reflect the “Gumby” philosophy. This philosophy calls for the principal to be available and spend time talking and listening to their beginning and veteran teachers. Principals should be prepared to

play multiple roles to beginning teachers (marriage counselor, town lawyer, sounding board, and financial advisor): “You need to bend, mold and twist yourself in whatever is needed for the circumstances at the time” (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 54). Brown and Wynn (2009) also share the sentiments of Leithwood et al. (1998) when they contend that “successful learning communities have principals that provide appropriate role models, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation and that foster acceptance of group goals. They share power, authority, and decision-making in a democratic way with teachers” (p. 44).

Scherer (2003) identified core induction tasks for principals such as:

- providing orientation to the site and resource assistance,
- managing a school environment that will support novice teachers,
- building relationships between principal and teachers,
- providing leadership for instructional development through formative and summative evaluation,
- pairing with the same grade mentor,
- and facilitating a supportive school context. (p. 34)

School leaders have an opportunity to reframe and reinforce beginning teachers’ self-perception as teachers and may suggest modifications to improve their teaching practice and shape their professional development, identity, and growth.

Workload

Beginning teachers’ workloads should center on building genuine relationships with students, families, and staff and becoming knowledgeable of the curriculum they teach. As veteran teachers, we often forget the necessary time it takes to balance all of the newness of becoming a teacher. As a principal, I tried to avoid placing too many responsibilities on my new

teachers. The job itself is overwhelming enough. New teachers do not yet possess the skills to balance serving on committees, for instance, and successfully planning for and teaching their students. Prilleltensky et al. (2016) contend that “the actions of administration, the management style of the principal, as well as the school’s organizational climate can affect a teacher’s sense of well-being” (p. 108). Beck and Kosnik (2002) conducted a study in which they discovered that the workload varied based on their student teachers’ lifestyles and situations. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) agree that “while many novice teachers may have had terrific intellectual preparation and outstanding student teaching experience, their limited experience generally yields an equally limited repertoire of classroom strategies. It’s a ripe situation for frustration” (p. 3).

A teacher’s job description can be so loosely constructed that additional duties and responsibilities are often added without consideration for whether they can be accomplished (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Again, the workload will be characterized differently based on each individual teacher. What one teacher may be able to manage well with grading, paperwork, and afternoon meetings, another may deem too much. Therefore, the principal needs to know each teacher’s capabilities and what they may or may not be able to manage. While the work has to be done (progress reports, report cards, assessments, lesson plans, etc.), principals can perhaps support beginning teachers’ workloads by allotting additional planning time to accomplish these tasks alongside their mentors.

Feedback, Communication, and Accessibility

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there,” said Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. Education is much the same way, especially for beginning teachers. Without a clear understanding of what “good teaching” is, BTs “above all, beginning teachers

want the principal to communicate the prevailing criteria for good teaching” (Brock & Grady, 1998, p. 180). Brock and Grady discovered that their interviewees (new teacher participants) desired specific feedback throughout their research. Public Education Network (2003) highlighted the importance of the school principal for beginning teachers.

New teachers listed several attributes and behaviors of principals and other school administrators that made a difference to their introduction to teaching. The first was accessibility. Teachers gave high marks to principals who make it easy for them to ask questions and discuss problems and those that provided them with assistance, guidance, and solutions. Feedback, direct assistance, collaborative working conditions, and involvement in meaningful decision making were perceived to be important. (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 43)

Research tells us that while some school leaders push for beginning teachers to “find their place in the school,” du Plessis and Sunde (2017) argue that “beginning teachers require the continuous support of engaged leaders to find or maintain a professional identity and become confident and effective teachers” (p. 139), especially in urban schools.

Research tells us that principals with open-door policies (accessibility), those who continually build leadership capacity within the school, including teachers in decision-making, is an advocate for BTs by removing stressors (excessive paperwork, time-consuming meetings, etc.), and publicly and continually recognize teachers for a “job well done” are more likely to retain novice teachers.

Social Justice

The initial interaction with students can be overwhelming for beginning teachers, especially if they have not had the proper training to teach students from diverse demographic

backgrounds. Bettini and Park (2021) coined this uncomfortable interaction as “practice shock” (p. 8) or the discovery that as a beginning teacher, one may not be fully equipped to capitalize on the various cultural backgrounds of the students in their classroom. “Practice shock is when novices are confronted with the discrepancy between idealistic visions of teaching and reality” (p. 8). Coupled with “practice shock” is “cultural mismatch” (p. 8). The cultural mismatch may lead novices to lower expectations and adopt a deficit orientation (Achinstein et al., 2010). The principal’s role in coaching beginning teachers is especially crucial at this juncture. This is the crossroads where some novice teachers decide to depart the “hard-to-staff school” and move to one that reflects their cultural background. However, most novices used these initial experiences to become more skilled teachers. Novices’ positive responses to their experiences were supported by pre-service preparation (Early & Shagoury, 2010; Rodriguez, 2015; Strom, 2015), mentors (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004), students (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Strom, 2015), smaller class sizes (Strom, 2015), and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008).

“Culturally responsive teacher education preparation-be it school-based professional development or a university preparation program-is necessary, even when teachers are from the same cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background of the students” (Khalifa, 2016, p. 1281). Therefore, the school leader must ensure that beginning teachers are and remain culturally responsive.

Critical Reflection

Learning to reflect upon one’s experiences is key to new teacher growth and development. Standard V of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process supports the practice of reflection for teachers. Cochran-Smith et al. (2010/2011) write about the “transition from

preparation to teaching in terms of more general teaching practices, such as developing a reflective stance or teaching for social justice” (p. 25). As cited in Leshem et al. (2015), Posner (1996) asserts that “More learning is derived from reflecting on experience than is derived from the experience itself” (p. 5). Principals can support this experience by analyzing one’s own beliefs and practices merged with what they have experienced in the classroom (reflection) by engaging in conversations that can unveil these experiences. “The professional identity that teachers construct during their first years of teaching is influenced by the support that they receive from the school administration” (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017, p. 144). Principals should establish a platform for new teachers to unpack their new experiences.

Milner (2006) highlights how preservice teachers need to engage in what he calls *relational reflection*. I find this type of reflection is also imperative for beginning teachers and all educators. We can often find ourselves removed from the realities of the students and families we serve. However, during relational reflection, we are challenged to focus on ourselves and our own experiences, life worlds, privileges, and positions concerning others (such as our students as racialized and cultural beings and our students’ parents). Khalifa (2016) suggest that scholars start to “recognize the need for professors of social justice leadership to develop their own critical consciousness before they attempt to impart this knowledge or affect the work of those they train as educational leaders” (p. 1285).

Beginning Teacher Induction and Training Programs and Mentoring

Besides receiving support from principals in several key areas, beginning teachers can benefit from another form of relationship-building and support through the more formal and traditional platform of a beginning teacher induction or training program and mentoring.

Induction and Training Programs

One of the most important aspects of a beginning teacher's journey is that of an induction or training program. Studies conducted by authors such as Carver (2002) contend that the concern over new teacher attrition and retention rates helps fuel the widespread interest in formal induction programs. The induction process or year-long BT programs have traditionally been the main platform by which a beginning teacher is introduced to the school culture and environment. Siwatu (2011) contends that induction should focus on the problems and actual needs teachers experience in the specific context in which they work (i.e., urban vs. rural). While an introduction system could be a huge asset for beginning teachers, it will not serve its purpose effectively unless a principal establishes this component carefully. More so now than 15 years ago, induction programs include the role of the school principal. Scherer (2003) contends that because principals are responsible for evaluating new teachers and fostering workplace conditions that support their development, principals should play a larger role in participating in or even helping to establish effective beginning teacher induction programs.

One study explained, "the 1980s and 90s generated a growing number of teacher induction programs aimed at helping beginning teachers make a successful transition from their teacher preparation experiences to being the teacher-of-record in a classroom" (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4). These types of programs typically include an orientation to the building and staff, where and how to access resources throughout the building, who to contact about specific needs in the building, and the assignment of a veteran teacher mentor. Brock and Chatlain (2008) suggested, "Superintendents were generally satisfied with induction programs but also recognized that improvements could be made to such programs. It was the principal who 'plays a central role in the effectiveness and success of an induction program'" (p. 383).

Many beginning teacher programs have monthly meetings for teachers in their first three years of teaching, highlighting prevalent issues for beginning teachers such as how to handle the workload, parent/teacher interactions, continuing to cultivate the culture, teacher evaluations, etc. Typically, a lead mentor or a team of mentors will facilitate this particular program. Historically, principals' roles are limited in these meetings so as not to interfere with or join in with these gatherings assuming that the teachers, both mentors and mentees, would be able to talk freely without the presence or pressure of administration. However, through research and experience, I have discovered that administrators' presence is often necessary. Amoroso (2005) explains,

There is incredible value in establishing a formal program to foster the development and growth of new teachers. Offering them a regularly scheduled time and date for learning and discussion is essential to their feeling valued and an excellent way to show them that their development is a top priority. The program allows the school leader—the keeper of the vision—to be the one to convey the message ... express the vision and values through the topics that we choose to present and discuss. Principals must design a program that supports your new teachers, offers them guidance, makes them feel valued, and gives them what they need to be effective in the classroom and within the school. The key is to begin some type of program and to be flexible, allowing it to change, evolve, and grow to best meet the needs of your new teachers. (p. 29)

Similarly, Harry Wong (as cited in Scherer, 2003) states that “strong induction programs introduce new teachers to the responsibilities, missions, and philosophies of their schools, and treat teachers as lifelong learners from the very first day of teaching” (p. 43).

Wood and Stanulis (2009) suggest an induction program includes several central elements, such as:

- A. **Reflective inquiry and teaching processes**—Helping novice teachers learn in and from practice by studying authentic practice artifacts and collaborating with other teachers. The principal’s hierarchy of importance also guides these practices. If reflective inquiry is an important characteristic the principal believes an educator should embody, it will become a prioritized component in the induction program.
- B. **Systematic and structured observations (feedback)**—Immediate feedback from observations are opportunities for a teacher to reflect critically on their practices, knowledge, and skills.
- C. **Formative teacher assessments**—Mentors teach novice teachers how to be reflective practitioners in their practice. Examples of observation feedback might include (a) how much a novice teacher focuses on specific students, (b) what students are off-task and for how long, or (c) what kind of classroom interruptions occur and how they are handled.
- D. **Administrator involvement**—Principals occupied five central roles in the induction process as (a) instructional leader, (b) teacher recruiter, (c) facilitator of site-based educative mentor preparation and mentoring, (d) school culture builder, and (e) novice teacher advocate.
- E. **School Culture supports**—The principal’s role goes beyond sponsoring orientation activities. The principal (a) learns about the district and state induction program and its expectations for principals, (b) participates in available principals’ induction training, (c) communicates with district induction personnel, (d) supports induction activities both during and after school hours, (e) plans special site-based activities in which novice teachers can interact with each other, (f) supervise and regularly

communicates with the mentor whom they appoint to run the school's induction program, and (g) regularly interacts with novice teachers at the site.

- F. **Educated mentors**—Refers to mentoring grounded in subject matter knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy. It focuses on novices and mentors collaboratively and reflectively designing lesson plans, discussing observations, analyzing student work, and reflecting on the novice teacher's growth as a teacher. (pp. 4–5)

Mentoring

Pairing a beginning teacher with a mentor who is solid in content, classroom management, and several other essential components and who is deemed an “accomplished or distinguished classroom teacher” is one of the first tasks that principals tackle upon hiring a new teacher. I can attest that this pairing must be made with careful consideration for both the beginning teacher and potential mentor. The principal needs to be a key player in establishing and nurturing this relationship between these two teachers. This relationship is established when the principal recruits, trains, and carefully matches mentors with mentees.

The most common mentor pairing for a beginning teacher is with a veteran teacher within the same subject or grade level. Prilleltensky et al. (2016) described mentoring as “the action a person takes to provide support and assistance to another.” They further state, “Effective teacher mentoring should address two problems: the abrupt and unsupported entry of first-year teachers into the profession, and the classroom” (p. 106).

The principal is charged with the careful and appropriate pairing of a mentor and mentee to serve as one of the foundational blocks for success for the beginning teacher. Ideally, the mentor and mentee should be from the same field or share similar pedagogy to plan and build upon the art and science of teaching and learning. The mentor should also be patient, supportive,

and available, instructionally, and psychologically. BTs endure lots of changes and challenges during their first few years. The mentor must be both a sounding board and a task-oriented person to listen to the novice teacher and still get the job done. The multiple interactions they share must be built on commonalities, such as teaching the same grade level and curriculum and trusting one another.

Some researchers found forms of mentor training helped mentors support mentees in their successes. Long et al. (2012) state that “having a mentor trained in empathetic listening helped beginning teachers to manage tensions around teaching” (p. 10). The relationship between principal and mentor and principal and beginning teacher must be uniquely cultivated and nurtured so that each party is successful in their prospective roles. In addition to the monthly sessions via the induction program, the principal should find ways to meet often with each mentor/mentee. Conducting a pulse check via surveys or mere informal conversations can give the principal an idea if the mentor/mentee match is a successful one. As a safeguard, mentees and mentors should also be able to voice the discontinuation of the relationship if the match is not a thriving one. Although most of the literature on teacher induction has focused on the importance of mentors, principals are clearly key figures in the induction process. Principals must play an active role in their meetings and interactions and be extra sensitive and careful not to mismatch these individuals. While the principal may not micromanage this relationship, they must always keep a finger on the pulse. Vierstraete (2005) explained, “it is critical that the mentoring relationship does not replace the beginning teacher’s relationship with the principal, but it is suggested that the school principal serve as the mentor’s mentor and as a secondary mentor to the beginning teacher” (p. 9).

Some school districts may require principals and mentors to conduct the weekly walkthroughs or meet with their BTs once a month. There are many variations by which this mentorship piece can be accomplished. The principal usually makes this decision at the school level. Visibility and communication of school administrators is a directive or expectation that varies from district to district, state to state. All in all, the principal's presence is essential to this platform of support for beginning teachers.

While many elite private school teachers just taught their usual classes online, confident in the knowledge that their students had access to the necessary technology, that the students' home environments would be supportive, and that the sizes of classes they had to manage on a digital platform were small, the results elsewhere were a lot more mixed. Public school teachers and districts scrambled to get resources out to young people and their families (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the themes and concepts that scholars have researched regarding beginning teachers' early years and how the principal has historically played a role in supporting them. I described how the principal constructs the space where beginning teachers take the first step in their professional careers and is a determining factor in that teacher's preparedness.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

“The success of beginning teachers is critical to student success and the success of both is largely the responsibility of the principal” (Tillman, 2005, p. 613). In line with Tillman’s statement, my intent in this study was to research the principal’s role in supporting beginning teachers during their first 3 years in urban elementary classrooms. Through a qualitative design, I explored principals’ perceptions regarding how they support beginning teachers. In this chapter, I describe the methods I used in my study.

Research Design

Qualitative research “begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 44). Qualitative researchers can collect data through interviews (structured, semi-structured, group interviews, etc.), surveys (constructed-response, multiple-choice, open-ended, etc.), observations, narratives, reflective journaling, and questionnaires. Qualitative research methods such as these allow the researcher to investigate and capture participants’ perceptions and feelings regarding the educational and social factors that affect their professional lives. For my study, I used basic qualitative research. “Basic qualitative studies are most commonly found in education. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) remind us that “the overall interpretation will be the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 25).

Setting

The school district where I conducted my research is the fourth-largest system in North Carolina and the 81st-largest in the nation. It serves more than 53,000 students in Pre-K through

Grade 12 with the goal of providing a quality education for each child. The school system has 41 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, and 18 high schools. Seven specialty schools bring the system-wide total to 81. Districtwide, 33.6% of the students are White, 29.8% are African-American, 28.4% are Hispanic, 5.4% are multiracial, 2.5% are Asian, and less than 1% are American Indian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The district's minority enrollment is 70%. Also, 47.2% of students are economically disadvantaged. An equal percentage of students (47.2%) are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program, and 13.2% of students are English language learners.

Of district teachers, 77.3% are licensed, and 96.1% have 3 or more years of experience. Of all the district's teachers, 12.2% are beginning teachers (1-3 years), while 84.1% are experienced teachers (4+ years). Of the beginning teachers, 10.8% are in high-poverty schools, 11.2% are in low-poverty schools, and 14.5% are from neither high nor low poverty schools. The district employs 61.2% of experienced principals (4+ years) and 38.8% of inexperienced principals (1-3 years). Of the inexperienced principals, 35.9% are in high-poverty schools, 38.7% serve at low-poverty locations, and 40.7% are identified as serving neither high nor low schools.

Participant Selection

In my study, I examined the role(s) principals play in supporting beginning teachers (BTs) in their first 3 years in the classroom in urban-characteristic schools. My initial search began by identifying North Carolina districts, specifically in the triad area, that have schools that most reflect the definition of urban-characteristic described by Milner (2012). Such districts have school(s) with high-poverty, diverse demographic students. I identified three districts that reflected these characteristics. I narrowed my search to one school district and cast a wide net with a broad search for 8-10 principals who led urban-characteristic schools in the school district

identified. Using the school's directory and networking with administrators I knew in this district I emailed a generic invitation to participate in my study (see Appendix A). My initial outreach for participants included 20 email contacts to elementary school principals. I received a response from 5 of the 20 administrators agreeing to participate in my project.

Data Collection: Interviews

As Patton (2015) describes, we interview people to find out those things we cannot directly observe of them. "We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions" (p. 426). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, "Interviewing is necessary when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 108). They also noted, "semi-structured interviews are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions" (p. 110). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was limited to virtual interviews via the Google Meet platform. This platform protected the safety of all participants. My initial plan was to conduct two rounds of semi-structured interviews. The participants provided me with such rich information that a second interview was unnecessary. However, if I needed clarity on something or needed additional information, I was able to contact the participants again.

Five principals volunteered to participate in my study. After acceptance, I sent them a Google survey to identify their availability (see Appendix B). Once an appointment was established, I scheduled a virtual meeting to build further rapport with them by reviewing the study's relevance and engaging them in a discussion about their schools. I reviewed again the purpose of this study to each participant to clarify and help them understand that the goal was not only to collect data but to also assist and collaborate in efforts to add to the existing literature on this topic and perhaps navigate through strategies beneficial to both parties—principals and BTs. The length of the interviews ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 hours. Each interview was audio and video

recorded. A reputable online company then transcribed the interviews, and the transcripts were provided to the interviewees for member checking to verify and clarify information. The interviews focused on historical data, including teacher turnover trends and the strategies that the principals used to hire and coach BTs in their first 3 years in the classroom (see Appendix C).

Initiating Research

I agree with Merriam and Tisdell (2016) on the need, before any interviews take place, to “establish rapport by fitting into the participants’ routines, finding some common ground and helping out on occasion and when suggested, being friendly, and showing genuine interest in their activities” (p. 143). First, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I followed the district’s established protocol to obtain data and gain access to employees. Following approval by the district and IRB, I began contacting participants and collecting data. Due to district guidelines, data needed to be collected before May of the school year. The email I sent to prospective participants included the purpose of the study, an explanation of the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and potential benefits of participation. Participants were provided with written consent in the form of a survey (which also allowed them to indicate their day/time of the interview) which reiterated these points and required the participants’ signatures to verify consent. I utilized pseudonyms to protect the identity of those who consent to participate. I also used pseudonyms for the selected schools.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data from the transcriptions and documents based on Lichtman’s (2013) approach: developing codes, organizing the codes into categories, and identifying overall themes. The first stage is the development of codes. I color-coded recurring words, phrases, and other shared practice patterns on the transcripts. As I analyzed the data, I also updated previously

coded data. Next, I organized the codes into categories. I identified commonalities among the codes and grouped them into overarching categories of shared beliefs, assumptions, associations, and practices related to the role principals play in supporting beginning teachers in their first three years in a classroom setting of an urban school. Finally, I identified five themes (full-sentence statements) that represented the findings of my study.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the strategy of reliability as “the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, would it (studies on a similar topic) yield the same results” (p. 56). They go on to discuss Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) conceptualization of reliability in qualitative research as “dependability” or “consistency,” meaning, “rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable” (p. 251). My research reflected this description of reliability. My purpose was to ensure that the data collected was consistent with existing research surrounding the support for beginning teachers.

Participant validation, or “member checking,” is another strategy to strengthen the credibility of data and results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participant validation implies that I, as the researcher, in one way or another, present the data material or the preliminary analysis to the participants to validate and assess interpretations. I presented each participant with a copy of the recruitment letter, availability google form, and a copy of their transcribed interview. The purpose was to ensure my study’s trustworthiness and ethical practices from the perspective of the researcher, the informant, and the reader (Carlson, 2010). With participant validation, I was transparent about how my participants would be represented, and I allowed them to correct misunderstandings and document the research process appropriately.

Positionality

As a former principal who served in urban schools, I found it difficult to retain beginning teachers. Five years ago, I would have disagreed with anyone about my practices in hiring and retaining new teachers because I considered myself a true advocate and cheerleader of beginning teachers entering the educational field with a new and exciting desire to serve our children. However, the data do not lie, and the data painted a different picture when analyzing teacher turnover in my school and district. My heart has typically led me to hire new teachers versus veteran teachers, but that mentality has often come back to hurt me since it was my beginning teachers who either left within their first 3 years or required so much more support than I realized I had to nurture them. Therefore, I began to examine my hiring practices and explore how other principals and districts support their beginning teachers, particularly in urban school settings. I approached this study with the intent of not only providing data to support beginning teachers but also assisting principals in recruiting and maintaining these important relationships with their beginning teachers. The evolution of this support will ultimately benefit our children. When I initially began this study, my position was as an acting principal; however, my lens shifted as I moved into a district role and could examine the effectiveness of the principal's role in supporting beginning teachers.

Summary

I used a basic qualitative research methodology to examine principals' roles in supporting beginning teachers in urban elementary schools. I collected data through virtual interviews of five elementary principals with various backgrounds serving in hard-to-staff urban schools. The findings that I share in Chapter 4 add rich insight into my study and future research on this topic.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from the study that I conducted to answer my research question: *How do principals prepare and support beginning teachers in urban characteristic school settings?* Through this research question, I sought to examine how the principal's role can either enhance or derail a beginning teacher's educational journey during their first 3 years in a high-poverty, city-based school setting.

The principals I interviewed, Walls, Beatles, Courtney, Quimby, and Washington, are educators with 20+ years of experience. All have served as assistant principals and are currently elementary school principals. Four out of the five currently work in urban, Title I schools, but all have served at urban schools at some point in their careers. Three of my participants are former North Carolina Principal Fellows; one has her Doctorate in Educational Leadership, one is on a Doctoral track, and one is an author. During the interviews, the other two principals did not disclose their pursuit of further degrees, but one has transitioned to a central office position within the same district. Table 1 provides an overview of the principals who participated in my study. According to the 2019-2020 North Carolina School Report Cards report, the following demographic and report card status for each school is listed below. For definitions of abbreviations, please see the note below the table.

Table 1. Study Participants

	Principal Walls	Principal Beatles	Principal Courtney	Principal Quimby	Principal Washington
Demographic Background	Black Female Late-40s	Black Male Late-40s	Black Female Mid-40s	White Female Late-40s	Black Female Late-40s
Years in Education	23 years	22 years	19 years	26 years	24 years
School Pseudonym	Kasey Elementary School (Urban setting & Title I)	Magnet Elementary School (Urban setting & Title I)	Franklin Elementary School (Urban setting, non-Title I)	Early Elementary School (Urban setting & Title I)	Davis Elementary School (Urban setting & Title I)
School Demographics	*45% AA *43% Caucasian *10% Hispanic *5% Other	*80% AA *15% Caucasian *4% Hispanic *1% Other	*10% AA *40% Caucasian *30% Hispanic *10% Multiracial *10% Other	*25% AA *8% Caucasian *65% Hispanic *2% Other	34% AA 24% Caucasian 34% Hispanic 8% Other
NC Report Card Status	*39% Economically Disadvantaged *TSI *CU	*46.9% Economically Disadvantaged *TSI *CU *Low-performing *Recurring low-performing	42.5% Economically disadvantaged No identifications	65.5% Economically disadvantaged *TSI *CU *Low-performing *Recurring low-performing *One of the lowest-performing schools in the state of NC (Bottom 5%)	67% Economically Disadvantaged *TSI *CU *Low-performing *Recurring low-performing

Note. Lateral entry– non-education degree (i.e., history)—currently enrolled in an education degree program; TSI school (Target School and Improvement—additional targeted support)—At least one subgroup where the Subgroup Performance Score is equal to or below the overall School Performance Score of the highest identified CSI – Low Performing School; CU school (Consistently Underperforming Subgroup)—A school is designated as a CU school if the same subgroup receives a grade of “F” for the most recent and previous 2 years (3 years in a row); Low Performing school—Low-performing school has received a School Performance Grade of ‘D’ or ‘F’ and growth status of ‘Met’ or ‘Not Met’; Recurring low performing school—As required by North Carolina statute, to be a Recurring Low-Performing School has been identified as a low-performing school in any two (2) of the last three (3) years. A low-performing school has received a School Performance Grade of ‘D’ or ‘F’ and growth status of ‘Met’ or ‘Not Met.’

Principal Profiles

Principal Walls

Principal Walls is an African American female educator serving in her fifth Title I school, Kasey Elementary. She is serving in the same district where she began her administrative tenure. Education is Principal Walls' second career choice as she initially received her Bachelor of Science degree in marketing from a local university. She quickly realized that business was not her passion and that she should be teaching. She returned to school to receive her teaching certification and Master's in Elementary Education and is currently serving in her 23rd year in the field. Mrs. Walls pursued another Master's degree in School Administration through the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program and is currently on the EdD track to receiving her doctorate. She has come through the ranks serving as a teacher assistant, teacher, assistant principal, and now principal.

Thirty-nine percent of students in Mrs. Walls' school are economically disadvantaged. It is designated as a Title I school due to its low-performance status. Her school has been added to the list of schools with Consistently Underperforming Subgroups and is designated a TSI school (Target School and Improvement—additional targeted support). In my interview with Principal Walls, she shared,

First and foremost, for me is school culture. Before I got to Kasey (Elementary), they weren't doing morning announcements. The kids weren't participating in that. There wasn't a focus on students. Parents were coming in and out; actually, one teacher was almost jumped by a parent. It wasn't a safe environment. And so, that goes back to your climate and your culture because if kids and staff don't feel safe, you can forget about instruction. So, I spent a whole lot of time working on that kind of stuff in that first year.

I didn't get it right all the time. But for that school, the culture is really big. And it was really big for kids and for beginning teachers because this generation will say "deuces."

Principal Walls has a passionate opinion about interviewing teachers who seek to work in Title I schools. She highlighted that relationship-building and sign-on bonuses are often offered for teaching at Title I schools.

So, for me, I normally just say, "Why this school?" and "What is it that has drawn you to this demographic?" The response that I'm looking for is, "It doesn't matter which group it is I'm committed to kids." That's what I want to hear. And I see the value of being an advocate for children. One of the questions I ask is, "What does Title I mean to you?"

And if they start talking about (money) ... Well, and most people don't know what Title I is. But they know that it's more money. They know that the school gets more money. But I'm looking for a mindset. So, when I talk about Title I (as she named her last 3 school assignments, which were Title I schools), my big thing was relationships, about building relationships. If your teacher's heart is right, there is no difference from the non-Title I. You've got to come in committed to the work. They (kids in Title I schools) have to have more.

She elaborated on what she meant by finding beginning teachers who are committed to the work, noting,

And I think that the other piece for me when I'm interviewing for beginning year teachers is, it is really about commitment to the work. I talk about skill and will. Because I can teach you skills, but your will is going to be what sustains you in the work. Title I isn't just a learning ground you're going to get in 2 to 3 years. Title I is really where you're going to learn HOW to teach.

Mrs. Walls then shared her thoughts on her current beginning teachers and the likelihood of retaining them or not. She noted that, except for this year, every BT that has started with her (as a BT) is still in place at the school.

I have five BTs, as of now. I've got a BT1 ... the foundation is just not there. Luckily, she's on a temporary contract, so I don't have to keep her. But the pickings are slim. It really is, the application pool is a joke right now. Pickings are slim to none.

So, she's my BT1. I actually have two BT2s. One has the skill. And we're doing some coaching. I'm taking this other BT2 to HR for possible non-renewal. As her issue again is that commitment. Then my BT3s, I have two of those. And they are fine. But they had been through a formal education program. When I hire BTs, my hope is that it's a good five-year commitment for me.

To encourage a 5-year commitment from her beginning teachers, Principal Walls relies on PLCs, also known as Professional Learning Communities. Principal Walls described the task of tackling the curriculum as "overwhelming," but she explained that building-level PLCs (curriculum-focused) and support systems could aid beginning teachers. She noted that she leverages instructional facilitators, the ERG agency, and mentors to form support teams. She stated,

We have a weekly PLT or PLCs, and then they have a weekly grade level meeting. I'm fortunate because I have my instructional technologist who came from ERG. She really has done some work with beginning year teachers. I actually contracted her at one of my former schools and have maintained that relationship. I have two assistant principals, and we each have two grade levels. So having a person that you can go directly to is a helpful structure. This way, beginning teachers know they are not just out there alone.

Because the Covid pandemic delayed almost 2 years of face-to-face instruction, Principal Walls shared how this situation has negatively affected this support and how her team has to shift teachers' thinking a bit. She said,

This year, because of a pandemic, we're actually trying to handle "concurrent teaching." So, there has been more talk about student engagement. [We ask:] "How are you going to try and engage your kids?" This year, they're also doing grade-level lesson plans. So, once you get your grade levels lesson plans (because we have a weekly PLC and then they have a weekly grade level meeting), [we ask:] "what are you doing with it? What are your questions? What bumps in the road have you hit?" And these conversations are totally with my instructional facilitator. I'm not in these meetings.

Regarding the support she provides for her beginning teachers, Principal Walls, similarly to the other principals in the study, spoke frankly about the lack of district-level support and mentorship. She explained,

I don't like the district mentor program. Yes, the BTs have a mentor in-house. They (BTs) do three days (of district training) at the beginning of the year. And then they come back to the school, and they have to go for half a day here or there, but there is no connection to pedagogy ... and no application. So, I'm not too crazy about it.

Mrs. Walls explained that having two assistant principals helps her BTs know who they can go to in times of need. This can be considered one layer of access to an administrator for direct and immediate feedback. Principal Walls noted that some principals use their positions as a "power trip." She stated, "my power was in my service. And so, that servant leadership piece helps mold my school culture and environment." Principal Walls noted further,

As a principal, I've got to be flexible and learn their language. And that's part of that relationship piece. And so, for my meetings with BTs, I take the SEL (social-emotional) approach. We're shooting the breeze ... "What's going on? How are you feeling? How do you balance it out honoring your commitments? Are you taking care of yourself? How can I help in that area? And then what questions do you have for me?"

Principal Walls also touched on the social justice and equity aspects of being a school leader.

She commented,

One of my final thoughts is, where does social justice and equity come in as part of the mentoring program for districts for BTs? Because when you think about Title I, you've got to know that they are normally the schools with the highest turnover. And so, where is the work for the district around that for beginning year teachers? The truth is, if we're really going to do the work, that conversation needs to be had with every beginning year teacher, regardless of whether it's Title I or not, because you're going to have children of color in your room. And if you tell me that you don't see color, I have a problem. I need you to see color! This might be another topic for further research because social justice and equity are buzzwords now. But I would wonder how many districts have really embraced it or if there's any work out there for social justice mentorship for beginning year teachers? The social justice or culturally responsive framework should be included in the professional development for beginning year teachers.

According to Principal Walls, the listening leader understands that school transformation is a long game. There are no quick fixes, turnarounds, or shortcuts. They leverage listening to grow a collaborative culture and build the capacity of teachers and staff.

Principal Beatles

Principal Beatles brings various experiences to the table. During his 23 years in education, he has taught English/Language Arts or English at every grade level. Additionally, he has his Master's in School Administration. After serving some time as an assistant principal and principal in the middle school setting, he decided to venture away from the public school setting. He worked as an educational consultant for an educational technology company. Mr. Beatles has served at the elementary and secondary levels and in an alternative school program.

Curriculum and instruction are his passions as he currently serves as principal at Magnet Elementary School. Mr. Beatles is also a published author of two books and an adjunct professor. Mr. Beatles' Title I school is 46.9% economically disadvantaged with the following designations by the state: TSI, CU, low-performing, and recurring low-performing. Mr. Beatles and I were administrative colleagues in another district. He served at a middle school, and I was at an elementary school. At the time, we often spoke about the struggle of hiring and retaining quality teachers, especially in our Title I schools. So naturally, we attended the same meetings and followed the expected protocols and procedures outlined by our superintendent and district. During his interview, he periodically referenced our conversations and activities in this district.

Principal Beatles shared his thoughts about beginning teachers and school culture using a candid analogy:

School culture ... Here's the thing. I keep going back to Mr. Krackle (former superintendent), you remember, he used to say, "Teachers don't leave buildings, they leave ... people." And the people make up that culture. Scenario: Why do I drive across town and spend five bucks at Starbucks when I can go to the Quality Mart and get that same cup of coffee for 75 cents? Because of how I'm treated and what I feel. The culture

in that building and making sure those BTs and every teacher is valued and empowered as best as you can, good, bad, or indifferent. That's everything! They have to be excited to come to work, and they've got to feel it!

Mr. Beatles believes in transparency, especially in the interview process with potential beginning teacher candidates. He shared,

In an interview ... I like it when an applicant takes an active interest in researching the school and doing their homework. If they don't, then I do their homework for them. I always do this thing at the end where my last question is, "Why us? Why Macklin Middle? Why you?" And then I go, "Before you answer that question, let me break this down. We are in year three as a low-performing school. We are a Title I school. That basically means that students are at or below the poverty level. That means in some cases, if we were to pull up PowerSchool (school database system), you will not see the name of a father. You may see a grandmother. I take them on a journey, and I'm very transparent about, "We're trying to grow. This is what I need you to do." Sometimes I get too real. I'll say, "This is not *The Blind Side*. This is not *Dangerous Minds*." Unfortunately, some teachers who apply for these hard schools aren't teachers of color.

In discussing recruitment and retention of beginning teachers, Principal Beatles noted,

The recruitment piece, that's a code I have not cracked yet. I always have to be careful with that. I rely a little bit more on HR. I'll rely on word of mouth. To me, retention comes down to listening, visibility, and then having active measures of support and empowerment. I'm a big praise and thanks person. I'll write a thank you note and place it in a teacher's mailbox ... if a teacher decides to leave, I ask myself, "Well, why are they leaving?" Yeah, that retention thing I wrestle with, but again, Title I schools are not for

everybody. If they want to leave, okay. Good luck in the country club zip code, because guess what? There is another set of problems, a different set of problems.

Mr. Beatles shared a little of the performance history of his school, which helped him shape his vision of curriculum, instruction, and achievement. Upon his arrival, the school was in Year 3 of low-performing status. Their EVAAS composite or growth status had gone from -1.42 to -6 to -5. In his opinion, there was no focus on their Professional Learning Communities/ Teams. He pointedly said,

The PLTs were weak. The emphasis was on fun and not the academic standards. We can definitely have fun ... but we have to teach. First and foremost, I try to get a mentor that is as close as they can be to the grade level. So, we have regular mentor meetings, and then every week, we have a standing meeting that I require them to go to called the BT1 collaboration. That's where they sit down with our IF, or instructional facilitator. The AP, or assistant principal and I are not in that meeting because we want that to be [the beginning teacher's] time to unload and unwind. We don't want them to be embarrassed to ask questions.

He relished having a strong instructional facilitator (IF) and leveraging her skills to unpack the standards, common assessments, and other key instructional elements. He said, they appreciate her. They love our IF! I love the fact that if they're calling her before they call me. That tells me that something is going right. Then, my AP, who is a strong instructional person as well, goes in and does informal coaching for the teachers.

Principal Beatles also shared his thoughts on carving out time to allow the BTs to shadow the instructional facilitator as she visits classrooms. He stated, "the other thing that we also try to do is have them do learning walks, just classic walkthroughs, with the IF and go see somebody

who's doing it within the building." Other layers of PLC support in Principal Beatles' school include an AIG (academically/intellectually gifted) catalyst teacher, who serves in this role and as a consultant with the ERG consulting company. He stated,

She's another set of hands to go in and give feedback, and that's another resource that they can go to. Between the AP, the IF, and my strong mentors, I feel really good about that support that we've got in place. I firmly believe, especially in a Title I school, if you need to have that aspirational piece in place.

Principal Beatles spoke candidly about his concerns about district support of beginning teachers. He recalled how intense and focused the programs were:

The state and district programs are not as strong as they used to be. I'll ask the BT1s, "How are the meetings going?" They're like, "It's a waste of our time." Remember, that state program was hardcore! They would go every week. They don't have any of that now, which is a shame, because that was a really good program. That's why this year, I just said to the IF, "we're going to create our own version of that within the building."

Principal Beatles spoke positively about the level of support he has this year compared to other years. "I've got a better handle on it because, frankly, I've got a strong team of instructional leaders that I've not had at any other school. It's nice to have a little bit of that lifted off my plate." Principal Beatles believes in walking around school at the beginning and end of the day and having informal conversations with teachers. He says things like, "Hey, I was thinking about this strategy that I saw you do, and I would love for you to share that at the next PLC."

With excitement in his voice, Mr. Beatles shared how proud he was of his beginning teachers:

Feedback and accessibility, that's where we (principals) really come into play. We have to be able to give solid feedback and coaching. I love doing walkthroughs. I take forever with walkthroughs ... not only do I like to write the thing, but I believe in giving quality feedback ... And again, I will say, these three BTs, man, they want to be coached. In fact, a kindergarten teacher was like, "I saw you in my classroom this week. What's going on? What's going on?" She says, "I want my feedback. I want to get better." That warmed my heart.

By taking a moment to listen and interact, Mr. Beatles demonstrates to the BT that they are important and valued. Mr. Beatles shared a time when he put this theory into practice. "If you can get it to them, give it to them. If I see a teacher in the office, I may ask if there is something they need. The BT may respond, 'Well, I need paper.' Here's where the little things matter. I'll say, 'Really? Come on. Let's get you some paper.' Mr. Beatles gave another example of how his accessibility allowed him to say "yes," explaining,

I had to do a post-observation conference with a BT1 today. Well, it just so happened to be during her planning time as the teachers were also supposed to retrieve their new laptops. She said, "Mr. Beatles, I know we had our post-observation conference scheduled for this time, but I'm scheduled to get my laptop." I said, "Really? Guess what? Watch this. We're going to go to the head of the line." I get to play my principal card. I said, "Come on with me." I said, "I love doing this." She says, "Really? But I'm at ..." I said, "No, no, no, no, no. It's all good. It's all good. Get your laptop, get your cord. Let's go."

Mr. Beatles takes pride in being present, visible, and patient. He assumes positive intent. Principal Beatles concluded his time with me by revealing some final words of wisdom he received from a former superintendent:

Man, what a wise, wise man! He said, “I don’t think any teacher comes in here saying, ‘I’m going to mess kids up or fail.’” I believe that every teacher who’s in here, especially BT1s, chose this profession for a reason, and I hope it’s for noble reasons. If you hired them, you hired them for a reason. You got to stick with them, you got to invest in them. That’s with all teachers, but if you hired them, then you got to be there for them. Always treat them like royalty.

Complimenting their maturity levels and responses to being coached, Mr. Beatles noted that of his three beginning teachers, “two are definitely going to stay. One will move, probably due to an impending marriage. But all of them are solid, proficient teachers.”

Principal Beatles also provided insightful thoughts on equity and culturally relevant training for beginning teachers:

The other thing, too ... is equity, cultural relevance, and cultural pedagogy training for beginning teachers. What training have they had on certain things? So yeah, you could say there are some things that rest upon the school, but I also trust that when I hire you, you’ve had some of these trainings. The assumption is that they’re getting those things in college, but they’re not. There’s a whole disconnect that is not happening. I just don’t think the coaching and the true experience of being in the classroom has been there for a lot of our beginning folks. If there was a way to devise a program to incorporate some of this would be helpful.

He tied his experience with his most recent appointment as an adjunct instructor at a local college:

I'm teaching a course right now at Statue University, and I don't know if I'll stick with it after this semester because there's just a lot missing. You've got folks that either haven't been in a schoolhouse in years or have not had any kind of instructional leadership experience, you know? I think we see a little bit of that on the school administration level. I mean, I'm sure some of your professors have been around the block and been principals and have some street cred, but there's something missing. I can't put my finger on it. You've got to have that street cred.

Principal Beatles' range of experiences from classroom teacher to consultant to author, adjunct instructor, and administrator has helped shape his ideas about working with teachers.

Principal Courtney

Principal Courtney is a former daycare director, EC teacher, and instructional coach who obtained her Doctorate after 15 years in education. She is currently in her 19th year of service to North Carolina public schools. She took a hiatus from the classroom and public education and worked for a popular educational textbook company. Dr. Courtney has served as an assistant principal and principal in elementary schools in two different districts. She now serves as a principal back in the district where she began her teaching career. Dr. Courtney's school, Franklin Elementary, is not a Title I school, but she has spent most of her time in Title I schools as it is her typical choice of population to serve. Franklin Elementary School received a B report card rating and exceeded growth for the 2019 NC Report Card. The school is 42.5% economically disadvantaged with no performance designations of low performance.

Dr. Courtney's former Title I school, Stone Elementary, was 61.6% economically disadvantaged with the following designations: TSI, CU, low-performing, and recurring low-performing. Dr. Courtney shared her experiences with the differences in cultures in a Title I school compared to a non-Title I school:

I feel like when I was in Title I, everything had a sense of urgency behind it, right? ... from budget to instruction. In a non-Title I school, it gets complacent at times. And sometimes I don't feel that sense of urgency [here] because we have a B [in the school report card rating]. And I don't think you get away from that sense of urgency of wanting all kids to grow, all kids to achieve at a high level. It's how do I bring that knowledge from a Title I perspective and help them see it, too. That we could be better than what we are. Let's not get complacent with where we are. Let's get better.

She continued with her views on the recruitment, interviewing, and retention of beginning teachers:

The last thing you want to do is set a teacher up for failure. If you get in that interview, and you realize that child—I say child because they're usually young—you realize that child is going to be a sheep among wolves. I try to put them in the best situation if they may struggle with classroom management. It needs to be a good fit for her and for you. So, that would be my advice. As much as we need to recruit teachers, and as much as we need to fill vacancies, make sure it's a good fit.

Dr. Courtney described her thoughts on school culture and how it typically plays out in her interviews with BTs.

I keep it as real as I can about the population, the demographic that we're working with, right? All the way from the child and what we can expect socially, emotionally from

them, but then also from the parent. What we can and maybe cannot expect. So, we deal with the elephant in the room, right? I can't get the parents on the phone. Can't get the parent to come to the building. We talk about that at a Title I school. Where the reverse is here. We talk about the ways the parent can support instruction in the classroom and how the parent can be a part of conferences and those types of things. We deal with the reality of the situation from a social-emotional aspect and understanding that you don't take it personal when the parent does or does not show.

Dr. Courtney's background is working with the exceptional children's department (EC). Therefore, her voice and passion are grounded in working with students with disabilities.

We talk about making sure that it's really a passion, right? Don't take the job just to get a job in the school system. If you're interviewing in a Title I school or a non-Title I school, you need to know something about the school. You need to know something about the demographic that it serves. EC in itself, I'll take that for an example, is hard on its own, but you put EC in an urban setting, and it just went up 10 notches, right? So, you truly need to be in this for the passion of the work. And then you need to have some ... Get up! You got to have some fight in you! Because it's not going to come, maybe as easy as they talk about it in undergrad.

During our interview, she also predicted how her current beginning teachers would fare by the end of the year.

Currently, I have six. All the way from year one to year four. I would say I'm solid on five returning to this school. I think all six will return to education next year, but one will follow the principal that was here last year, who went to a more urban school that has a

bonus. And so, I see where the appeal is financially, and support that choice. But I would say out of that six, five will return.

Unlike Principal Beatles, Principal Courtney attends all of her BT monthly meetings. Four of her new teachers are EC teachers, which, again, is Principal Courtney's background. Interestingly, Principal Courtney mentioned that because her current school is not Title I, the "typical or normal PLC" looks different. She emphasized that because this school received a "B" on the state's A-F assessment tool, their PLCs focus less on unpacking the curriculum, creating essential questions, unpacking data, and similar assessment-related activities. Instead, the PLCs at her current school spend time discussing other topics like field trips, materials, and resources. She referred back to the "complacency, lack of urgency" mentality of a non-Title I school vs. a Title I school. She hopes to shift the culture and PLC conversation at her current school back to focus on curriculum, teaching, and learning.

She proudly shared the beginning teacher support platform that she was able to implement upon her arrival at her new school:

So, one thing I started at my old school (Title I) that I brought to Franklin Elementary (current school) was a beginning teacher monthly meeting. In my former district, they had in every school what they call a beginning teacher leader. I had my BT leader meet with the BTs monthly on a topic that might be anywhere from HR, to how to request a sub; just dealing with different aspects of being a BT. Who do you call when something goes wrong on your computer? Who do you call if you have a child you think you might need to send to social services? What do you do if you have a child you think has a deficit in learning? So, every month we cover a different topic. And I brought that model here to Franklin, and they have loved it. We call it the New Beginnings Meetings. This

year, I actually incorporated teachers that were new to the school, too, not just those who were beginning teachers. I'm at all of them. Now, here, they don't have a lead BT in every school, so it is me. I am the lead BT, but each of the mentees has a mentor. It kind of created a new set of, a little bit of a culture shift, right? That you are important. "We want to retain you. We didn't just recruit you for the sake of recruiting you, but we want to retain you. We want to grow you." And I'll be honest, it's a lot of work to put together and come up with a different topic every month, but I've seen the benefit of it.

Principal Courtney shared how she tried to be accessible and share feedback with her teachers.

I hope I present a risk-free environment in the sense that building relationships is a part of the initial process, right? Really getting to know them, especially when we were all remote at one point. I couldn't have a big staff meeting where I got to really introduce myself and have that face-to-face interaction. So, establishing rapport and a relationship with them was important. Now in order to do that, I had to have direct contact with them on a more frequent basis. So, I do all of their (BTs) evaluations. When we meet, we have some very candid conversations about different things. I talk about being in the role of a coach and then being a coachable adult and what that looks like. And I want them to grow as much as they want to. If they want to become the principal and replace me, that's what I want for them. Out of those six, I believe four of them are EC. And so, having that EC background has really paid off for me because there is that relatable piece there as well.

Principal Courtney gave some interesting parting words of wisdom as she closed her interview. She emphasized that "reflection" is essential.

If teachers don't know how to take a step back from each day, they're going to have a hard 30 years in education. The one thing we've talked about with reflection is making that a part of self-care. What happened today? Could I change it? Probably not. Will I change it? Probably need to. And what will be the steps that you take with that? So, I would definitely say reflection. From having gone through it and not taking the time to really implement that self-care on the way home as a beginning teacher, reflection is important to teach them early and not later. So, then principals should support, support, support. Even if it's just a listening ear. I've noticed that in my work with BTs, a lot of times, they come in here, they vent, and they really don't want me to say anything. I don't need to say anything. But they just need to get it out. The frustration, the anxiety, the annoyance, or whatever it might be. So be a good listener.

Dr. Courtney concluded by thanking me for this work. "I appreciate what you're doing, and I hope that something really good comes out of it, honestly. Because I think BTs are often the forgotten ones."

Principal Quimby

Principal Quimby has served in various schools for over 26 years in education. Her teaching background is middle school, while her administrative experience has been in elementary schools, both non-Title I and Title I. She is also a graduate of the North Carolina Principal Fellows program. She is now principal of one of the lowest-performing schools in North Carolina, Early Elementary School, as she was placed there to "turn it around." Early Elementary School is 65.5% economically disadvantaged and listed in the bottom 5% of lowest-performing schools. In addition to the school's Title I status, they are also listed to receive target support and improvement (TSI), consistently underperforming, or CU, low-performing, and

recurring low-performing. Principal Quimby considers herself a “middle of the road” principal, flexible in serving both affluent and urban, high poverty schools.

Principal Quimby shared the experience of her most recent transfer to a Title I school, describing how the interviewing process and retention of beginning teachers contribute to the school’s culture. Like the other principals, she too referred to finding the “right fit” for the school when interviewing beginning teachers for a job.

I think culture is one of the top because culture is going to get at a lot of the other parts, so if you have a culture that has been created to support, to promote collaboration, that’s going to help with the workload features. We are trying to create a very positive culture at Early (Elementary), and so we’re selling our culture as well as we’re selling the opportunity to truly make a difference. So that’s what we try to tell teachers. I can offer new teachers the support of veteran teachers. Some veteran teachers came with me, and eight came with me in August. So far, I’ve hired one brand new teacher since I’ve been here. I did lots of surveys and things when I first got there about what is good about Early Elementary and what needs to change, and that type of thing. It is the care they have for that community and for the children. And there are teachers who have been there for a long time. They have taught siblings, they have taught parents of some of the children that are there now, and so there are some teachers and teacher assistants that have been there for 15 years. There are a couple of people that have been there for 25 years.

Principal Quimby briefly described her beginning teachers and her thoughts on her own feedback and accessibility.

I have a BT1, BT2, one BT 2, and then there are probably four lateral entry teachers. One of the lateral entry teachers is not going to make it. Teaching is just not her thing. The BT1 came with me from my former school. She was a phenomenal teacher assistant. She spoke about how she believes collaboration among teachers, especially with beginning teachers, helps retain those teachers. She stated,

Collaboration does make things easier for them (BTs) when they can collaboratively plan lessons and the workload is not all on their shoulders. Because in elementary school they plan everything they teach, they can be collaborative in planning math and science, social studies, and reading. This helps take stress off of them. So, I think that the culture of the school and the collaborative environment is going to help with retention.

Principal Quimby emphasized, “the principal sets the tone to support new teachers.”

Principal Quimby has been a principal the longest of all of the administrators I interviewed. She has led schools ranging from affluent to populations who live in poverty. She has spent many years in this district, and this interview demonstrated that she might have the most access or networks to more resources to pour into her current school. Her school is a part of the Opportunity Culture Model which includes a partial release MCL, or multi-classroom leader. This person leads PLCs for two grade levels, Grades 4 and 5. The EITs (extended impact teachers) take over these classrooms when the MCL moves out to coach other teachers and lead PLCs in the building. Principal Quimby’s school is also part of major curricular and professional development initiatives such as Inspire 340, Heggerty Early Learning coaches for grades K-2, and ERG for professional development in guided reading. She can pay for a full-time MTSS (multi-tier support system) teacher who leads intervention support for students and teachers and

pulls small groups for reading and math. In addition, Mrs. Quimby has a reading support teacher and an EC program manager.

Principal Quimby has tried to use her connections, networks, years of experience in this district, and Title I money to leverage maximum teacher support, which may ultimately benefit student achievement. She shared,

The MCL is new to this school. She came with me from my former school. The extended impact teacher, he was already here, but he needs to move to the MC because he's awesome. The instructional facilitator came from another school to be here with me. We also have an MTSS teacher, the Title I schools were allotted a MTSS teacher, and so she does a lot of interventions and helps teachers plan interventions. She is not a classroom teacher; she pulls small groups for intervention. And then we also have a reading teacher who not only supports reading but she supports the teachers in lesson planning as well.

Principal Quimby explained that because she has various people in place for instructional support, she does not participate or sit in on any of these meetings or PLCs. She noted,

I do not attend these meetings. I have a very open-door attitude about things, and so they come and meet with me whenever they feel like it. I touch base with them on a regular basis to make sure that things are going smoothly for them. One of the new teachers is an EC teacher, and we have an EC program manager that supports her every week. Just like Marzano said, feedback is important for children, I also think feedback for teachers is just as important; feedback when they're doing a good job and feedback if something is not going well and how they need to "shape it up."

Ms. Quimby's parting thoughts took a different route. She shared some resources and literature that have helped mold her leadership along the way.

There are some good books that I have had teachers read. *The First Day* is one. *One-Two-Three Magic for Teachers* is a great one for discipline and classroom management. For principals, *What Great Teachers Do Differently* is a really good one. And there is the one by Kafele, *The 50 Questions for Teachers, 50 Questions for Principals*. I think Kafele is the author. So those are my “go-to’s” that have helped me. There is also an article called *Irreplaceables*, and it talks about supporting good teachers as opposed to all of our energy going towards getting rid of not-so-good teachers.

Finally, Principal Quimby noted, “At the end of the day, I think that the principal sets the tone for that support. I talk to a lot of other people about supporting new teachers and supporting each other, but it’s the principal who sets the tone for that to happen.”

Principal Washington

Another alum of the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program, Principal Washington has served in NC public schools for 24 years. She taught Kindergarten and first grade in a Title I school. She currently commutes at least an hour to and from where she resides. She believes her leadership style can fit any demographic, but she feels best utilized at highly impacted/Title I schools. She is currently the principal at Davis Elementary School. With an economically disadvantaged rate of 67%, Davis is also designated as Title I, targeted support and improvement (TSI), consistently underperforming subgroups (CU), low-performing status, and recurring low-performance status. Mrs. Washington describes the experience for beginning teachers as “challenging.”

As Principal Washington shared her thoughts on interviewing beginning teachers and their relation to school culture, she folded in her perspective on relationships and communication with parents:

I'm completely honest when interviewing candidates. We discuss some of the challenges you will find in terms of developing relationships with parents, and once you gain trust with parents, then you have a better opportunity of being able to be honest with them about their student's progress. I tell them that it's hard for parents to trust teachers, often because of their level of academic experience. Some did not have a positive experience; therefore, they see us as the enemy. So, when working with new teachers, communication is a big component.

Principal Washington continued to share her experience with retention and how collaboration and PLCs have helped curb that phenomenon. She noted,

I barely really lost my new teachers. My teachers who leave are veterans of 10 years and more. They were ready for a change. The new teachers who leave the classroom do so because they did not fulfill the lateral entry requirements.

Principal Washington explained how she used PLCs to support her beginning teachers, noting,

I currently have three BT1s and I have three BT2s. Now, out of those six, only two of them actually have degrees in education. Everybody else is lateral. And so that's a challenge. And for me, the majority are EC teachers, and I'm running into the dilemma of teachers running out of time on their emergency license. Some haven't decided on an educational program or college. Some were just admitted into a program in the past couple of weeks only when I had to light a fire under them to actually begin their licensure programs. I only have one who graduated from State University (a local university), and she is doing very well. She has done a phenomenal job. I have another young lady that went to college in Virginia. But those are my only two who actually have

education degrees. Therefore, pedagogy has been a challenge because they lack the knowledge and skills to instruct children.

Principal Washington touched on how she approaches pedagogy and curriculum for beginning teachers. She starts with nurturing their mindset and mental health, then dives into the curriculum.

First and foremost, especially this year, we try to give grace to our teachers. I see the new teachers are doing phenomenal with the teaching online [as she described the mode of delivering instruction due to the pandemic]. They've been doing really well, because technology is what they are comfortable with, so it's just a matter of trying to balance it all. One instructional focus has been math modeling. We have a school improvement director, and she was trained in math program called Singapore Math, so we have started Math Mondays. This was way for me to help my BTs with pedagogy and curriculum. The school improvement director and the math coach walk our beginning teachers through the program. So, we focus on being encouraging while intense attention to teaching and learning.

Next, she described the reading aspect of PLC support for teachers.

We've tried to give support through articles and literature. The majority of the articles that we've been looking at have dealt with the growth mindset, self-care, and the student voice ... just making sure that we're listening to children. Giving them opportunities like choice boards. The teacher then becomes the facilitator of learning, and the students can demonstrate ownership and pride for their work. The students having choices in their academic progress has been another one of our targets this year.

Mrs. Washington spoke highly of her assistant principal, a former MTSS (multi-tiered support coach) coordinator from Kansas. She stated, “He is phenomenal! He’s been in classrooms modeling lessons and coaching; he’s phenomenal! I actually learned a lot from him through his conversations with the teachers during their mid-year conferences.”

Principal Washington described a platform called “glows and grows” by which teachers can share out in the PLTs. “We ask everyone to share something that’s going well and/or something that’s not going so well. It’s good for them to know, I’m not out there in the world all by myself. There are other teachers who have similar experiences.”

Principal Washington described her philosophy on coaching beginning teachers, noting, I would say having an open-door policy and allowing them to come in and talk has worked in my favor in retaining beginning teachers. You learn to listen. We all have mandates, but they’re human; they’re young, and they’re trying to establish themselves. So, I think we (principals) have to learn how to coach and mold our BTs. I think as principals, we still need to offer all the support and conversations. But I think our first challenge, or our first goal should be to coach and model.

Mrs. Washington chimed in on university preparation and its effect on this generation of beginning teachers:

I would say that the colleges and universities should give pre-service teachers an opportunity to be in the schools more. I think some university professors have a skewed idea of what school looks like now. Our teachers are not getting a true picture of what education consists of. At the end of the day, they need to practice; they need exposure. We need to zero in on what they will actually be teaching young people in the classrooms. The only way that this can happen is for student teaching to occur earlier in

the game ... maybe in their sophomore year, once they've made the decision to enter into the education department to exit as a beginning teacher, then they need to be student-teaching in the field. It can't wait until their senior year or their last semester; it should be consistent throughout their sophomore, junior, senior years.

Like other principals in the study, Mrs. Washington highlighted the need to expose beginning teachers to the cultural diversity aspect of the profession and how social media has had a major impact on the profession.

The patience of teachers is different, and the content is more intense. We teach all different populations of students. There are so many cultural pieces that BTs need to be exposed to. Sitting in a college classroom listening to a professor who has had little experience in an elementary school is not going to benefit the future teacher. The only person that really has a true understanding of the classroom experience is probably the supervising professor.

Then you have the whole legal part and the ethical factors of being a classroom teacher and working in a school setting ... What you can or cannot say when you are on social media sites and in public settings. We didn't have this social media piece when we began our careers. And that's so touchy nowadays.

Principal Washington's final remarks focused on building a community of trust. She shared, "trusting teachers to make sound, professional decisions tells them that you value and believe in them. Teachers who are trusted take risks and are more comfortable collaborating with their colleagues." She believes that this kind of trust will contribute to a stronger dedication to the profession and the kids, therefore creating and maintaining a healthy culture—a place where everyone looks forward to coming to work. She stated, "most importantly, this foundation of

trust and collaboration will lead to engaging and rigorous learning opportunities for our students.”

Of the five principals, Principal Washington candidly shared her keen awareness of how close she is to physical and mental burnout. The “gumby” stamina she once had is now wearing thin. She shared that she doesn’t mind sharing the stage with the next generation of administrators and principals. The previously mentioned factors of supporting beginning (and veteran) teachers who may or may not be highly qualified and establishing a platform of positive cultural interactions and professional collaboration do affect an administrator. Research reminds us about the “revolving door effect” of beginning teachers; hence, the process of nurturing new teachers in a school building can be taxing on a principal. Upon completing this study, Principal Washington was offered a central office position in the same district and is looking forward to serving students, families, and teachers in a different capacity.

Summary: Main Themes

After analyzing my interviews with the teachers, I discovered five main themes. These themes were evident in the profiles I developed, and they represent the findings from my study.

Theme 1. Principals in Urban Schools Seek to Hire, Support, and Retain Beginning Teachers Who Will Benefit from and Contribute Positively to the School’s Culture

Each of the principals reflected on what they look for when hiring and retaining beginning teachers. And each of them shared that they inquired why the applicant had selected their school in which to interview or seek employment. Because novice teachers who serve in urban schools experience different working conditions than novices in schools serving predominantly White and affluent communities, conversations about those differences are

imperative to establish this relationship between BTs and principals. Often, these conversations do occur in the interviewing stage of recruitment.

Theme 2. Principals in Urban Schools Implement Various Structures, so Beginning Teachers Have Support Systems and Opportunities to Network and Collaborate With Other Educators

While PLCs are an integral part of teacher relationships and serve as a platform to discuss curriculum, assessments, and resources, there are other forms of support that our principals elaborated on. Ranging from monthly mentor/mentee meetings to weekly PLCs, each school has its own experts to facilitate these support systems. Each principal uniquely designed what this support looks like based on what their teachers and students need and the human resources available to execute this assistance successfully.

Theme 3. Principals in Urban Schools Provide Feedback and Make Themselves Accessible in Ways Intended to Allow Beginning Teachers to Gain Knowledge About What is Going Well in Their Teaching and What Areas They Need to Improve

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of SEL or social-emotional learning is necessary for students and teachers, especially beginning teachers. Research tells us that the pressures of the past 2 years have compounded the stress on teachers and administrators. Therefore, principals must forge a human connection with teachers. Likewise, today's younger generation of educators will not move forward in their educational and career journey without a sincere, authentic connection with administrators, students, and colleagues.

Theme 4. The Study Principals Shared Specific Advice for Current and Novice Administrators to Consider When Supporting Beginning Teachers

Early research consistently reinforces collegial and administrative support for beginning teachers. Each principal shared their thoughts on the continuum of support for novice teachers beginning at the collegiate level to the school and district levels. The perception that new teachers are “equipped and ready” upon entering the classroom is a myth. In reality, “teaching the teacher” begins upon hire. Some might call it “on-the-job training.” My participants suggested that more needs to be done in coordinating BT support from college professors to principals to district leaders. Close partnerships among higher education providers, employers, schools, and other stakeholders may provide beginning teachers with the security they need to enter the workforce confidently.

Theme 5. The Principals Called for More Emphasis on Training and Workshops for Teachers Regarding Social Justice and Equity in the Schools

The principals examined the exposure of cultural layers in the schools’ populations with the expectation to teach and nurture every child. All of the principals agreed on some level that the conversation about social justice needs to be had with every beginning teacher. Discussions on equity, cultural relevance, and cultural pedagogy should be implemented at district and school levels.

Summary of Chapter IV

In this chapter, I presented profiles of my five participants, focusing on how they supported beginning teachers. I also described the five main themes of my study that represent my findings. In Chapter V, I analyze my findings by linking them to the research literature I examined in Chapter II. I also discuss the implications of my findings and recommendations for

the next steps and offer recommendations for further research and practice. I will conclude Chapter V with my final thoughts and reflection while assembling this body of work.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of my study was to examine the roles that principals play in supporting beginning teachers in their first 3 years of teaching in urban elementary school settings. I used a basic qualitative research methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to explore the practices and strategies of five elementary school principals in a local school district located in the Triad of North Carolina. My research consisted of semi-structured interviews via Google Meet, a virtual platform whereby we met online. I used this platform due to the Covid-19 pandemic and to ensure the safety of the participants and their staff. In Chapter IV, I presented profiles of the five principals, emphasizing how they support beginning teachers. These profiles revealed participants' stories and experiences. After analyzing the interview data, I identified five themes representing my study's findings.

In this chapter, I state my findings and analyze them by connecting them to existing research. I also revisit my conceptual framework of role theory and social capital theory and examine how those theories relate to my study's findings. I discuss the implications of my research, including how it can be a guiding tool for practicing and future principals in laying the foundational success for beginning teachers in urban schools. I conclude this chapter with a personal reflection on my study.

Analysis

The research question driving my study was, *How do principals prepare and support beginning teachers in urban characteristic school settings?* I will answer this question by restating my five findings from Chapter IV and then connect them with existing research.

Finding 1: Principals in Urban Schools Seek to Hire, Support, and Retain Beginning Teachers Who Will Benefit from and Contribute Positively to the School's Culture

Culture was at the top of each principal's list regarding how they support teachers. Each spoke about how establishing a positive school culture can help lay the foundation for common goals and expectations. Principal Beatles concurred with this thought. He shared,

Teachers don't leave buildings, they leave ... people. And the people make up that culture. Scenario: Why do I drive across town and spend five bucks at Starbucks when I can go to the Quality Mart and get that same cup of coffee for 75 cents? Because of how I'm treated and what I feel. The culture in that building and making sure those BTs and every teacher is valued and empowered as best as you can, good, bad, or indifferent.

That's everything! They have to be excited to come to work, and they've got to feel it! Darling-Hammond (2015) and Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) noted that a school's leadership style influences its ambiance and atmosphere. School leaders construct the space where beginning teachers take the first step in their professional careers and determine whether beginning teachers are prepared for success.

Principal Walls agreed with the sentiment of fostering a positive school culture and ensuring that the focus is on children. She stated,

First and foremost, for me is school culture. Before I got to Kasey (Elementary), there wasn't a focus on students. It wasn't a safe environment. And so, that goes back to your climate and your culture because if kids and staff don't feel safe, you can forget about instruction. School culture is really big for kids and beginning teachers because this generation will say "deuces."

Ingersoll et al. (2018) reminds us that principals must intentionally pair beginning teachers with veteran teachers. The principal must model and teach veteran teachers how to support beginning teachers.

Culture and climate are often used synonymously but are different in context. School culture refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of *beliefs*, *values*, and *assumptions* they share. School culture reflects the “**lifestyle**” of the school—that is, the general way in which the school operates each day. School climate refers to the school’s effects on students, including teaching practices; diversity; and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students. School climate reflects the “mood” of the school/classroom (Kafele, 2015, p. 21). Barriers such as language, diverse backgrounds, values and traditions, and social factors are all factors that a BT must navigate in their beginning years. Cultural diversity training on how to navigate through these obstacles will assist beginning teachers in building relationships with students and ultimately provide them with a rich education (Milner, 2012).

Finding 2: Principals in Urban Schools Implement Various Structures, so Beginning Teachers Have Support Systems and Opportunities to Network and Collaborate With Other Educators

“Support systems” is an umbrella term representing the many different types of support that the principals extended to beginning teachers. While there were many commonalities that the principals shared in the types of support they established for their BTs, individual principals also described some approaches that were unique to their schools. Principal Walls, for example, described the task of tackling the curriculum as “overwhelming,” but she explained that building-level Professional Learning Communities (curriculum-focused) and support systems could aid

beginning teachers. She noted that she leverages instructional facilitators, the ERG agency, and mentors to form support teams. She stated,

We have a weekly PLT or PLCs, and then they have a weekly grade level meeting. I'm fortunate because I have my instructional technologist who came from ERG. She really has done some work with beginning year teachers. I actually contacted her at one of my former schools and have maintained that relationship. I have two assistant principals, and we each have two grade levels. So having a person that you can go directly to is a helpful structure. This way, beginning teachers know they are not just out there alone.

Principal Walls' approach is supported by existing research. For example, in reporting the results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (2014), Linda Darling-Hammond wrote, "U.S. researchers have also found that school achievement is much stronger where teachers work in collaborative teams that plan and work together. Whether teachers are working on instruction, developing curriculum, or discussing students, they value the opportunity to collaborate" (p. 4).

All principals emphasized how effective support systems can help with teacher retention. Principal Quimby believes collaboration among teachers, especially with beginning teachers, helps retain those teachers. She stated,

Collaboration does make things easier for them (BTs) when they can collectively plan lessons and the workload is not all on their shoulders. Because in elementary school they plan everything they teach, they can be collaborative in planning math and science, social studies, and reading. This helps take stress off of them. So, I think that the culture of the school and the collaborative environment is going to help with retention.

Building learning communities is an important part of new teacher support by which principals can lay a strong foundation. An effective professional learning community is an

extension of the school's vision and mission statements. It is also a part of the school's culture from which all teachers prosper, both veteran and new. "All teachers benefit from pleasant and collegial work environments, professional standards, and the development of a shared language around a common mission" (Scherer, 2003, p. 33). Each principal has established some form of PLC in their school buildings. However, four out of the five administrators do not attend these meetings. Instead, their instructional leaders, such as instructional facilitators, grade-level team members, outside agency members, and assistant principals, facilitate the PLCs. Dr. Courtney is the only administrator who does attend each of her BT meetings as she had to create this platform when she recently arrived at her current school.

In addition to PLCs, the collaborative learning community extends to mentors, beginning teacher programs or beginning of the year intake process, and district-level support. The principal is charged with the careful and appropriate pairing of a mentor and mentee to serve as one of the foundational blocks for success for the beginning teacher. BTs endure lots of changes and challenges during their first few years. The mentor must be both a sounding board and a task-oriented person to listen to the novice teacher and still get the job done. Long et al. (2012) state, "having a mentor trained in empathetic listening helped beginning teachers to manage tensions around teaching" (p. 10). The relationships between the principal, mentor, and beginning teacher must be uniquely cultivated and nurtured so that each party is successful in their respective roles. None of the principals gave extensive responses on mentors but did confirm that each BT is carefully paired with a mentor, typically one who is in the same content or grade level as the beginning teacher.

Bettini and Park (2021) report that school principals should intentionally create opportunities for novices to obtain instructional support; these opportunities include observations

with feedback and modeling by instructional coaches. Novices report that interactions with colleagues provided them essential opportunities to learn about content, curricula, pedagogy, and students. The principals had very strong beliefs about how this layer of support is very minimal or non-existent. They believe that districts should offer ongoing, wrap-around support for beginning teachers throughout the school year. Principal Beatles spoke candidly about his concerns about district support of beginning teachers. He recalled how intense and focused the programs were:

The state and district programs are not as strong as they used to be. I'll ask the BT1s, "How are the meetings going?" They're like, "It's a waste of our time." Remember, that state program was hardcore! They would go every week. They don't have any of that now, which is a shame, because that was a really good program.

Like the other principals in the study, Principal Walls spoke frankly about the lack of district-level support and mentorship. She explained,

I don't like the district mentor program. Yes, the BTs have a mentor in-house. They (BTs) do three days (of district training) at the beginning of the year. And then they come back to the school, and they have to go for half a day here or there, but there is no connection to pedagogy ... and no application. So, I'm not too crazy about it.

Finding 3: Principals in Urban Schools Provide Feedback and Make Themselves Accessible in Ways Intended to Allow Beginning Teachers to Gain Knowledge About What is Going Well in Their Teaching and What Areas They Need to Improve

Principals should take the information gathered and make it applicable to their everyday actions of being visible and accessible to their beginning teachers. Most educators would describe this practice as simply having an "open-door policy" whereby the BT can seek them

(the principal) out for assistance. However, the BTs often look for the principal to take the initiative to talk to them, seek out and give them feedback on their progress, or simply visit their classrooms with positive intentions.

Some research (Brown & Wynn, 2009) describes feedback and accessibility as the “Gumby” philosophy, which calls for the principal to be available and spend time talking and listening to their beginning and veteran teachers. Principals are like Gumby in that they should be prepared to play multiple roles to beginning teachers (marriage counselor, town lawyer, sounding board, and financial advisor): “You need to bend, mold and twist yourself in whatever is needed for the circumstances at the time” (Brown & Wynn, 2009, p. 54).

Principal Walls shared what this looks like in her building, explaining,

As a principal, I’ve got to be flexible and learn their language. And that’s part of that relationship piece. And so, for my meetings with BTs, I take the SEL (social-emotional) approach. We’re shooting the breeze ... “What’s going on? How are you feeling? How do you balance it out honoring your commitments? Are you taking care of yourself? How can I help in that area? And then what questions do you have for me?”

Principal Beatles takes pride in walking around his school to have informal conversations with his teachers. He stated,

Feedback and accessibility, that’s where we (principals) really come into play. We have to be able to give solid feedback and coaching. I love doing walkthroughs. I take forever with walkthroughs ... not only do I like to write up the observations, but I believe in giving quality feedback.

Building a culture of trust often means just saying “yes” to beginning teachers’ requests, even if you have to deviate from the daily activities of managing a school building. Mr. Beatles

shared a time when he put this theory into practice. “If you can get it to them, give it to them. If I see a teacher in the office, I may ask if there is something they need. The BT may respond, ‘Well, I need paper.’ Here’s where the little things matter. I’ll say, ‘Really? Come on. Let’s get you some paper.’”

Principal Courtney shared how she tried to be accessible and share feedback with her teachers, especially amid the pandemic.

I hope I present a risk-free environment in the sense that building relationships is a part of the initial process, right? Really getting to know them, especially when we were all remote at one point. I couldn’t have a big staff meeting where I got to really introduce myself and have that face-to-face interaction. Establishing rapport and a relationship with them was important. So, I had to put in the work to do that.

Principal Washington identified with “thinking outside the box” to mitigate the barriers of the pandemic. She shared how nurturing people’s mindset and mental health is extremely important, explaining, “First and foremost, especially with this year, we try to give grace to our teachers. I see the new teachers are doing phenomenal with the teaching online [as she described the mode of delivering instruction due to the pandemic].”

Social capital has been both a precondition of how well teachers have been able to respond to COVID-19 and a positive outcome of collaborative relationships strengthened by the necessity of digital platforms. However, balancing this type of collaboration while embracing individualism is yet another feat of public education for beginning teachers and veterans alike. Therefore, beginning teachers may seek the green light from their administrators on when to collaborate and when to trust one’s own ideas to add to the normative feature of the entire system of the school community.

Finding 4: The Principals Shared Specific Advice for Current and Novice Administrators to Consider When Supporting Beginning Teachers

Wood and Stanulis (2009) stated, “If reflective inquiry is an important characteristic by which the principal believes an educator should embody, it will become a prioritized component in the induction program” (p. 9). I am a strong believer in modeling what we expect to receive back from others. Principals have a golden opportunity to foster and create this safe place for beginning teachers. Standard V of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process supports the practice of reflection for teachers. Cochran-Smith et al. (2010/2011) write about the “transition from preparation to teaching in terms of more general teaching practices, such as developing a reflective stance or teaching for social justice” (p. 25).

Milner (2006) highlights how preservice teachers should learn how to engage in *critical reflection*. Milner (2006) defines critical reflection as

the process by which adults identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins assumptions, question the meaning of assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting. The critical reflective process is to challenge the prevailing social, political, cultural, or professional ways of acting. (p. 102)

As Milner worked with preservice teacher candidates, he realized how critical the role of reflection has “on a teacher’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions” (p. 101). Therefore, he implemented a reflective practice through journal writing. Milner (2006) explained,

This writing assists teacher candidates in connecting new learning with prior experience, posing appropriate questions, and exploring their thinking. Writing about their experiences in classroom teaching gives them means to remember, recall, reconstruct, re-create, and represent what they learn of their teaching practice under supervision. (p. 102)

Mr. Beatles shares a similar thought through his experiences as an adjunct professor:

I'm teaching a course right now at Statue University, and I don't know if I'll stick with it after this semester because there's just a lot missing. I can't put my finger on it. I would've assumed that students coming from the teacher programs would be better prepared to enter the field. But there's more work to be done on that level to match what our schools need and expect.

As cited in Leshem et al. (2015), Posner (1996) asserts that "More learning is derived from reflecting on experience than is derived from the experience itself" (p. 5).

Lastly, Dr. Courtney emphasized how essential reflection is, If teachers don't know how to take a step back from each day, they're going to have a hard 30 years in education. The one thing we've talked about with reflection is making that a part of self-care. What happened today? Could I change it? Probably not. Will I change it? Probably need to. And what will be the steps that you take with that? So, I would definitely say reflection. From having gone through it and not taking the time to really implement that self-care on the way home as a beginning teacher, reflection is important to teach them early and not later. So, then principals should support, support, support. Even if it's just a listening ear.

Principals can support this experience by analyzing one's own beliefs and practices merged with what they have experienced in the classroom (reflection) by engaging in conversations that can unveil these experiences.

Finding 5: The Principals Called for More Emphasis on Training and Workshops for Teachers Regarding Social Justice and Equity in the Schools

The principals shared how social justice, cultural responsiveness, and equity are crucial components of beginning teachers' experiences during their early years in the classroom.

Principal Walls shared her thoughts,

One of my final thoughts is, where does social justice and equity come in as part of the mentoring program for districts for BTs? Because when you think about Title I, you've got to know that they are normally the schools with the highest turnover. And so, where is the work for the district around that for beginning year teachers? The truth is, if we're really going to do the work, that conversation needs to be had with every beginning year teacher, regardless of whether it's Title I or not, because you're going to have children of color in your room. And if you tell me that you don't see color, I have a problem. **I need you to see color!**

Principal Beatles chimed in with his thoughts on equity and culturally relevant training for beginning teachers.

The other thing, too ... is equity, cultural relevance, and cultural pedagogy training for beginning teachers. What training have they had on certain things? So yeah, you could say there are some things that rest upon the school, but I also trust that when I hire you, you've had some of these trainings. The assumption is that they're getting those things in college, but they're not. There's a whole disconnect that is not happening. I just don't think the coaching and the true experience of being in the classroom has been there for a lot of our beginning folks. If there was a way to devise a program to incorporate some of this would be helpful.

Mrs. Washington's thoughts on cultural relevance and responsiveness are coupled with ideas of how social media plays a part in this phenomenon. She reminded us,

The patience of teachers is different, and the content is more intense, but then also, we have all the different populations to teach. Then there's the whole legal part and the ethical parts of being a classroom teacher and working in a school setting ... What you can or cannot say when you go on social media sites and in public settings ... we didn't have that whole social media piece when we began our careers.

Bettini and Park (2021) asserted that "practice shock" (discrepancy between idealistic visions of teaching and reality) coupled with "cultural mismatch" (intentionally or unintentionally lowering expectations for students and adopting deficit thinking) is a tough obstacle to overcome in 21st-century teaching and learning. Three of the study principals were aware of these issues and therefore highlighted the need to address beginning teachers' cultural responsiveness. Unfortunately, this is the juncture at which some White, middle-class, beginning teachers decide to move on from an urban school setting to one that reflects more of their cultural background.

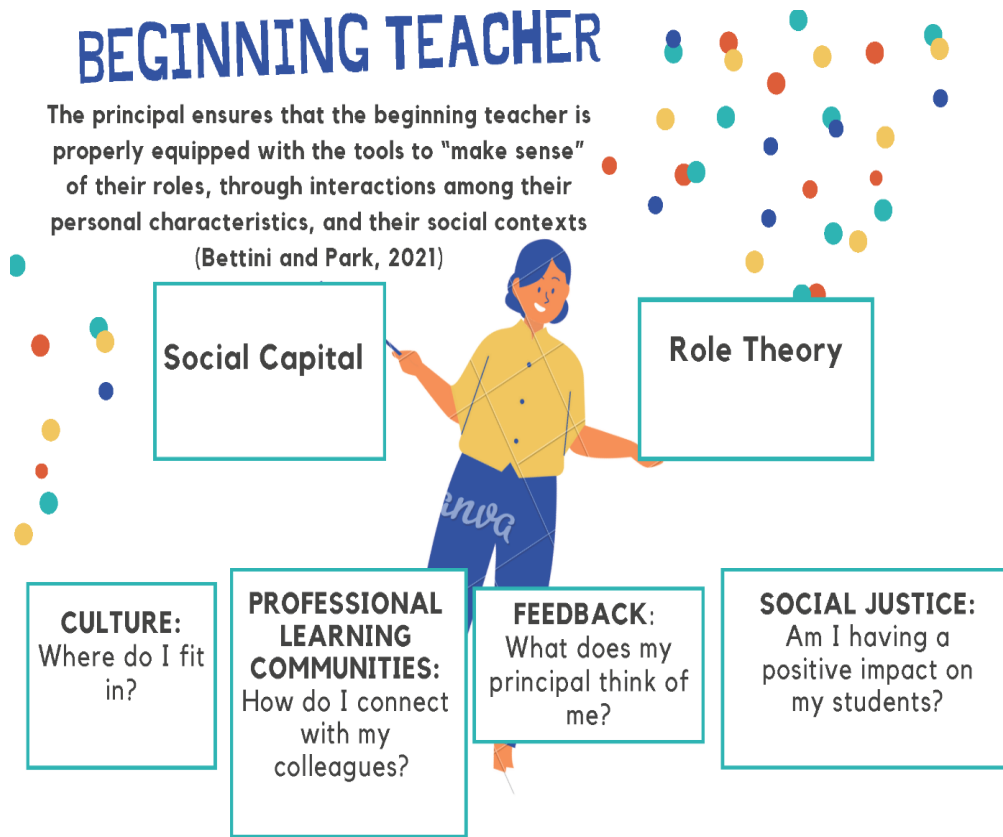
Revisiting My Conceptual Framework

As I noted in Chapter 1, my conceptual framework focuses on combining social capital with role theory in assisting novice teachers in finding their place in a new setting as beginning teachers. The principal must take an active role in establishing the foundational blocks to guide, coach, and promote success and longevity. The beginning teacher must balance these phenomena and concepts of belongingness and purpose and weave them through the structures of school culture, collaboration, and social justice.

Positioning social capital theory with role theory, we can identify and understand why it is often difficult for novice teachers to find their own place among those who already exist in school culture. “Some novices were able to use social capital within the community to help improve their school and to counter prevailing stigmas about working in high-poverty, urban communities” (Bettini & Park, 2021, p. 19). The principal is the key person in ensuring that the beginning teacher is properly equipped with the tools to “[make] sense’ of their roles, through interactions among their personal characteristics, and their social ... contexts” (Bettini & Park, 2021, p. 6).

To represent how my findings relate to my conceptual framework, I created a graphic organizer (see Figure 1). The beginning teacher graphic organizer is a visualization of why the principal should carefully equip each focus area for the beginning teacher with intense support so the teacher can successfully balance them all. In the visual, I portray the beginning teacher as balancing the theories of social capital theory and role theory in addressing their beginning teachers. Then, I show the four main areas of support principals can provide their BTs: culture, learning communities, accessibility, and social justice. For each area, I list an essential question a beginning teacher might ask in regard to their needs in this area. In the following pages, I describe how principals can approach each of the main focus areas for beginning teacher support.

Figure 1. Beginning Teacher Graphic Organizer



Culture: Where do I fit in?

As a former principal, it was important to offer a warm, positive welcome to our newest members to our school family. Introductions to office staff and mentors, a tour of the building, and a luncheon was usually a successful way to accomplish this meet and greet. The luncheon included ice breakers, discussions on what the first five days may look like (for example, moving in, meeting teachers, and participating in workshops). This platform was a relaxed way of setting the tone, establishing expectations, and allowing the new teachers to ask questions to other new staff in an intimate atmosphere. As Angelle (2006) notes,

The success of new teachers seems to be related to the school culture in which their first experiences as beginning teachers take place. In this, the principal plays a pivotal role. School leadership as the fulcrum for organizational climate and socialization sets the tone

for the beginner's first experience ... largely through the assistance and monitoring of the principal. (p. 13)

My intent was to create a positive cultural environment so the new staff can get an idea of who they can connect with, establish their footing, and begin to figure out where or how they fit into this new environment. Research supports that beginning teachers' decisions to remain at the school site are strongly influenced by principal leadership and school climate (Wynn et al., 2007). Principals are encouraged to create a platform by which beginning teachers enter the school on a positive note with anticipation of a great year. Using their district and community resources, principals can make their first day a memorable one.

Professional Learning Communities: How do I Connect With my Colleagues?

Beginning teachers are on foreign soil when they enter a new school building. They are challenged to become acclimated to a new environment, new people, new curriculum, expectations, and students. It is an overwhelming task to undertake. Therefore, it is the principal's responsibility to assist the beginning teacher with connecting with colleagues. Principals are encouraged to believe in the collective inquiry and importance of nurturing a positive, energetic, cohesive network of learners (Brown & Wynn, 2009). In my experience, this collaboration also occurred at my BT luncheon by establishing time for mentors and mentees to talk and bond, and simply allowing the BT to settle into their new classroom. Long et al. (2012) state that "having a mentor trained in empathetic listening helped beginning teachers to manage tensions around teaching" (p. 10). Several ice breakers and bonding experiences are essential at the opening of a new school year and throughout the school year. Oftentimes, new teachers join a staff mid-year, therefore, the principal is tasked to maintain high morale and positive collegiality.

“Great school leaders create nurturing school environments in which teaching can flourish and grow” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 13). Professional learning communities are essential to educating teachers as much as students. Daily, weekly, and monthly collaboration among teachers and staff allows them to share power, authority, and decision-making. Thanks to professional learning communities, beginning teachers report “going to colleagues for support, valuing their membership in a community with a shared mission, and experiencing a sense of belonging, ownership, and satisfaction” (Early & Shagoury, 2010, p. 1053).

Feedback and Accessibility: What Does my Principal Think of me?

The Public Education Network (2003) conducted research that highlighted the importance of the school principal’s accessibility to beginning teachers. In this research, new teachers noted that accessibility is an important attribute to school administrators. They gave high accolades to principals who make it easy for them to ask questions, discuss problems, and offer guidance and solutions. In contrast, “other novice teachers report feeling invisible in schools where administrators did not communicate regularly or offer support” (Early & Shagoury, 2010, p. 1053).

During my years in the principal’s role, my accessibility came in various forms. I always had an open-door policy whereby teachers could come to me at any time to have a talk. These were often informal conversations or responses to simple questions or inquiries. I also implemented book studies for my beginning teachers. This platform not only open doors for conversations, but it may have been a catalyst to address a concern or issue that needed to be resolved. Although time-consuming, this one-on-one time offered many benefits which made it easier if/when the time came to have difficult conversations. du Plessis and Sunde (2017) state that “beginning teachers require the continuous support of engaged leaders to find or maintain a

professional identity and become confident and effective teachers” (p. 139), especially in urban schools.

Social Justice: Am I Having a Positive Impact on my Students?

Bettini and Park (2021) coined “practice shock” (p. 8) as the discovery that as a beginning teacher, one may not be fully equipped to capitalize on the various cultural backgrounds of the students in their classroom. “Practice shock is when novices are confronted with the discrepancy between idealistic visions of teaching and reality” (p. 8). Coupled with “practice shock” is “cultural mismatch” (p. 8). The cultural mismatch may lead novices to lower expectations and adopt a deficit orientation (Achinstein et al., 2010). Assisting a beginning teacher in how to identify and balance the impact they are having on their students may be one of the most crucial roles a principal can play. Wisdom and exposure to real life experiences within the community that the BT serves are tools by which the BT should be equipped. The principal’s role in this juncture of coaching and mentoring could be the crossroads where some novice teachers decide to remain at the hard-to-staff school or depart to another school.

I tackled this task through exposure to community and district events, school-level professional development and activities, etc. One activity that was always an exciting eye-opener for beginning teachers to our district was a bus tour. This bus tour took new teachers around the city to see and gain knowledge on where students and families lived in the community. It was a great discussion-starter in expectations for students and staff. Khalifa et al. (2016) suggest that principals should be culturally responsive leaders who promote a school climate inclusive of “minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts” (p. 1274) such as in urban school settings. “School leaders also maintain a presence in, and relationships with community members they serve. Therefore, the professional development they lead for their

teachers and staff must continuously be responsive to minoritized students especially as student demographics shift” (p. 1274).

The Privilege Walk was one of my favorite activities to initiate the difficult conversations on topics that are often avoided like race, gender, background, beliefs, and biases. In essence, the staff would form a line where they are standing side by side. The facilitator asks various questions that requires the group to either step forward, step back, or remain still. The activity not only sparked interesting conversations but allowed people to identify commonalities among one another. Each year, we learned something new about each other. Opportunities like these can transfer into the classroom opening the eyes and hearts of teachers, thus, ensuring an equity education for all students.

Recommendations

In this section, I offer recommendations based on my study. Specifically, I present recommendations for principals, districts, and researchers. We can actively participate in continuing this work. There is so much more to be explored and accomplished from my research.

Recommendations for Principals

This research gave the principals and me permission to revisit our foundational preparations for the principalship. Once the bell rings and the business of running a school begins, the core of our personal beliefs about education can get lost. Talking with these principals helped me remember my “why.” As I constructed the conceptual framework, I realized how overwhelming these beginning experiences could be for new teachers. As administrators, we must be careful and strategic to organize and help beginning teachers prioritize their responsibilities on this new journey.

The whole phenomenon of social justice is not new to American education. As an adjunct instructor, I am reminded and can now make more of a connection to what social justice and cultural relevance were in the 1960s compared to today. I can prepare my students and assist in their connections of James Baldwin's speech, "A Talk to Teachers," to our present-day circumstances and instructional methods for children. One recommendation that my principal colleagues and I agree on is the need for this type of support and preparation to surface at the top of foundational courses, pre-service, and student-teaching experiences—to be intentional about integrating discussions and experiences that focus on social justice and equity.

Principals are charged with creating a path for our beginning teachers to become veteran leaders. Beginning teachers have so much to offer our students, schools, and communities. Reid (2015) and Worthy (2005) shared that there are still other factors surrounding mentoring and induction programs that play an integral part in influencing teachers' likeliness to remain in the classroom. These factors include but are not limited to school culture, school leadership, teacher-mentor quality and relationships, salary, etc. Indeed, a "discussion of mentoring cannot be complete without including the principal" (Worthy, 2005, p. 395).

As a reflective practitioner, I noted my thoughts as I constructed this study. Keeping the key research question in mind, "*How do principals prepare and support beginning teachers in urban characteristic school settings?*" I saw a window of opportunity for my research to develop further. Therefore, based on the interviews and subsequent tracking via social mediums, I would like to offer the following recommendations:

- A. Whether or not the district has some type of intake or onboarding for beginning teachers, principals should prepare to have some type of intake on a smaller scale for the school building. School tours, mentor/mentee introductions, classroom setup,

beginning teacher luncheon, and Q & A reference sheet are ideas of what the intake process could include. While this may be standard practice for most veteran principals, it may not be as explicit for beginning principals. Research recommends that school leaders invest extra time in building relationships with novice teachers. For instance, they should schedule informal observations and meetings early in the school year, so that BTs have an opportunity to get clarifications about administrators' expectations for their work and to obtain more support if necessary. Principal Beatles reminds us that "teachers don't leave buildings, they leave people... And people make up the culture. The culture in a school building is about making sure the BTs and every teacher is valued and empowered."

- B. Principals should purposefully plan for others to provide support. "Beginning teachers rely on a network of support, from colleagues as well as administration; school leaders facilitate the development of that network, but ensuring that skilled instructional support personnel (e.g., mentors, instructional specialists, etc.) have dedicated time for supporting each beginning teacher" (Bettini & Parks, 2021, p. 24). Principals should continue to support beginning teachers by offering and allowing them to shadow or visit teacher leaders' classrooms to observe effective practices such as classroom management and facilitating instruction. This will take some planning on the principal's part to carve out schedules to accommodate this visitation, but I believe it will be well worth it.

Bettini and Park (2021) bring these ideas to a concise conclusion:

Consistent with prior research on teachers in general (e.g., Guarino et al., 2006; Kraft & Papay, 2014), novices reported that supportive, instructionally focused interactions

with colleagues and administrators facilitated their learning (Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Hopkins & Spillane, 2015), their commitment to CLR practices (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006), and their commitment to continue teaching in their schools (Early & Shagoury, 2010; Waddell, 2010). (p. 16)

- C. Principals should remember that beginning teachers come with great ideas and practices of their own. Allow or open up a platform for beginning teachers' voices to be heard. Don't assume that you (the principal) have all the answers. Allow the BTs to say things like, "I need this from my principal, or it would be helpful if my principal would ..." Send out a survey to further open communication and conversation. The teaching profession needs confident, well-prepared, and well-positioned beginning teachers. Beginning teachers rely on school leaders and colleagues they can trust to guide them through their first teaching experience (Du Plessis et al., 2014).
- D. Another component of support that, again, may be standard practice for some is a mental health check-in with BTs. The pressures of teaching have not been alleviated; in fact, the expectations are more intense and difficult to manage in the wake of the pandemic. Therefore, I recommend that principals build in some components for physical and mental health check-in, perhaps designating a space for a walk on a treadmill or offering a list of internal and external resources like an employee assistance program. Most districts contract or network with resources to support personal or work-related counsel for employees. One of my colleagues offers Wellness Wednesday for her district. She sends out helpful YouTube videos or

coordinates live chats with licensed therapists to offer tips for balancing work and home responsibilities.

- E. Principals should also manage a way to offer coaching reflective of equity and cultural relevance in the classroom and among staff. Each principal noted in their interview that there had been little to no focus or even conversations about cultural pedagogy or social justice from their new hires. One principal stated that he assumed that his beginning teachers had some background knowledge surrounding this topic but was disappointed to learn otherwise. Not only should this conversation bridge from university to the classroom, but it should be continuous to foster crucial conversations and positive resolutions for students and staff.

Bettini and Parks (2021) suggest that “to retain teachers in high-poverty schools for longer, states should consider incorporating strategies to improve school social contexts into equity plans” (p. 25). I personally believe and agree that states should invest in and “consider whether their administrator licensure programs adequately prepare school principals to cultivate positive school cultures and provide instructional support for novices in high-poverty urban schools” (p. 25).

Recommendations for Districts

Districts can take a more aggressive approach to lend support to principals to have more to offer their beginning teachers. Research tells us that “most principals are hired without skills to nurture novice teachers effectively” (Menchaca, 2003, p. 25). Better preparation for principals will influence stronger preparation and support for beginning teachers. Therefore, further research is needed to “identify specific leadership styles and practices of principals who most effectively promote teacher retention” (Wynn et al., 2007, p. 224), particularly in urban-

characteristic schools. For instance, the district where I conducted my research has introduced a form of principal support. This district was selected to participate in the Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiative. This program's purpose is to invest and coach principals who can develop their district's vision of equity. Twenty years of research concludes that effective principals have a strong, positive impact on students and schools, making successful investments in principals highly cost-effective. An effective principal has nearly the same impact on student achievement as an effective teacher but across an entire school.

Most districts have some professional development or on-boarding activities for beginning teachers. I contend that those PDs should go deeper to offer monthly district meetings that focus on specific topics such as educating exceptional children and understanding individualized education plans (IEPs), cultural pedagogy, social justice, and equity, and many, many various topics. Principal Beatles recalled how "hard core" the teacher induction programs were that districts offered in the past. Somehow, we (districts, policy makers) have gotten away from this type of induction for BTs. The bus tour I mentioned in the previous section could be another way for beginning teachers to experience the communities in which they teach. And sometimes, just a simple Q&A session for beginning teachers (perhaps in small groups or round table discussions) could be another idea to lend support and collegiality for BTs. The principal is the most recognizable leadership position in a school and the position most empowered by district and state policy. "Research suggest that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274).

Recommendations for Researchers

Khalifa et al. (2016) suggest that scholars start to “recognize the need for professors of social justice leadership to develop their own critical consciousness before they attempt to impart this knowledge or affect the work of those they train as educational leaders” (p. 1285). I strongly believe that principals, district leaders, university leaders, and pre-service teachers would benefit from researcher-facilitated round table discussions about best practices in preparing our future educators for the field. One topic requiring continued research and careful implementation is social justice and equity. Universities across North Carolina implement the edTPA portfolio or its equivalent where reflective documentation is included in the student-teaching experience. Perhaps, we can allow for experiences and documentation to surface that reflect social justice, cultural relevance, or how equity is or is not practiced or exhibited in the school or classroom. Milner’s (2006) research and Principal Beatles’ experiences as an adjunct professor clearly recognized this need. These types of discussions and discoveries could and should be carried over to the school building for the principal to continue to build upon.

I also offer a platform to visit public school classrooms and schools to gather authentic evidence from beginning teachers and principals to extend my current research or to conduct a spinoff with more focus on beginning teachers’ experiences or insight on working in urban schools. These evidences and findings could be used in practices preparing upcoming cohorts of teachers to assist with retention and attrition. As an adjunct who has worked on school and district levels, I have been invited to the table for these types of discussions. I eagerly accepted invitations in efforts to expand the curriculum and experiences for our future teachers as well as offer insight on the public-school practices in an urban school district. Higher education providers and schools must work together to integrate effective theory and practice. Further

research may also be necessary to better understand how beginning teachers' experiences in high-poverty schools differ from those in low-poverty schools, why these differences occur, what impact these differences have on attrition and instruction, and how "school demographics might moderate the effect of certain experiences (i.e., structured curricula) on important outcomes" (Bettini & Park, 2021, p. 26).

Closing Reflection

I reflect on my experiences as a new teacher and how I looked to my principal for guidance. I relied heavily on her and my colleagues to show and model for me. I, too, began my teaching career in a Title I, high-poverty area. My first year was a big learning curve for me. While I could identify with some environmental situations like single-parent households, I struggled with the lack of parental involvement I faced as that beginning teacher. It was only when my principal, and honestly, a parent, helped me realize not to judge a book by its cover. For example, I mistakenly assumed that lack of parental appearance in the classroom or school building implied that the parent did not care. My former principal took the time to talk me through my misinformation and bias. These are the types of challenges that my principals spoke about that we often forget to coach our beginning teachers through. The time taken to coach and nurture me established a forever friendship and mentorship between my former principal and me.

I can recall and reflect on my interactions, successes, and limitations in supporting my former beginning teachers. I have always championed the beginning teacher because of the unconditional and positive support I received from my former principal and teacher colleagues. I tried my best to mimic that level of support. Sometimes I was right on target, and sometimes I missed the mark. The hardest type of feedback reflected my actions as an administrator; however, that feedback also nurtured my professional growth as an administrator.

Because of these experiences and the work that I have been blessed to do as a principal, my passion now shifts to working with beginning teachers on the collegiate level to prepare them with 21st-century skills to survive in high-poverty environments. We need teachers to learn skills for all facets of classroom experiences but serving in urban school settings is my passion. I have had the opportunity to coach and mentor some of the best teachers in these environments. They are continuing to be successful in these types of schools. And I have also lost some teachers to these types of schools because it was too much for them to handle. As my principal participants stated, working in a high-poverty school is not for everyone and is not for the faint of heart. However, some beginning teachers don't realize their potential until they get in one of these challenging positions. As Principal Walls stated, "you've got to come in committed to the work. Children in Title I schools have to have more. Title I is really where you're going to learn HOW to teach." In my research, all the principals contend that if you can successfully teach in an urban school, you are equipped to teach anywhere. As stated throughout my research, urban schools are faced with many challenges. If a beginning teacher can navigate through these challenges with a support principal and colleagues, they should have a strong, solid foundation to navigate through other obstacles, all the while building personal character, growth, and best practices for children.

As a veteran school-level principal, I offer advice and support to those principals currently in school buildings. Interestingly, most of those conversations have been about creating and maintaining positive relationships and school culture and how to retain quality beginning teachers. These types of conversations confirm that this study is still and will continue to be relevant in our urban schools and communities. Each day I spent on my study encouraged me to reflect upon my practice as a leader in the classroom, on the school and district level, and on the collegiate level as an adjunct instructor.

My work on the collegiate level is just beginning and I am motivated to take my knowledge and scholarly work to embark upon pre-service teachers. Because we have such a dire need for quality educators to serve in all schools, but especially urban settings, it is my intent to serve in a role that will contribute to their preparation. In my foundations course, I merge the history of education with the practicalities of the public-school experience. Early in this study, I mentioned the idea of exposure earlier in the collegiate years for students who seek to serve as educators. In my work as an adjunct, I arrange visits for my young educators to read to students in urban schools, just to get a sense of the atmosphere in which they may ultimately teach. We have discussions on the injustices that they encounter now as a student and what they may encounter as an educator. We talk about socialization, culture, race, and the legal aspects of education and how they impact student achievement. We identify key stakeholders in a school building with whom they can connect with upon securing a teaching position. We also discuss how public education is not for every educator and how school choice not only applies to students and families, but to them as future beginning teachers.

I have also been fortunate enough to serve in two district-level roles where I have been able to assist more in the equity realm of serving our kids. As the former Academically/Intellectually Gifted Coordinator for my district, I was challenged to analyze the opportunities afforded to our non-white students to take higher-leveled classes or be placed on the academically and intellectually/gifted track. I examined the instruments and methods used to place our students and track their progress and success. This task led to discussion and future implementation of a more accurate and current screening tool for the next school year. It is exciting to ensure that equitable practices are extended to all students. Likewise, the support will

be extended for teachers to adequately identify and serve students according to their academic and social-emotional potential.

I now serve as the Accountability Director for the district. This role allows me to interact with and support principals in analyzing data and practices to improve instruction for students. My role and goal are to empower leaders to engage in informed decision-making and provide information and services to education stakeholders through project development and design, data analysis and interpretation, and consultation. Because of my solid foundation in education and through my committed work as a principal and Ed.D. student, I am equipped and continue to grow as a dedicated professional to our generations of teachers, students, leaders, and community through service, accountability, equity, respect, collaboration, and transparency.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak to an administrative intern who is seeking an assistant principalship. She was placed in the middle of a situation where she was directed by an assistant principal to ask a teacher to administer an end-of-grade test; no problem there. The problem erupted when the intern was ill-advised to violate the Testing Code of Ethics to simply get the job done. The intern had no idea of the misguidance she received that landed her in my office as the Accountability Director. Leaning on my knowledge and growth as a principal, I was equipped to help the intern to understand the severity of what she was asked to do and still manage to salvage her integrity and possible pending employment. I was able to coach her through the emotions of the mistake and move forward on a positive lesson learned as a potential administrator. Hopefully, she will take this experience to pass along to her staff, including her beginning teachers.

My current role also offers support to the district structures for welcoming beginning teachers. Working in a small district offers its rewards. We can collaborate and put thoughts into

actions with little turnaround time. Establishing and executing key conversations such as understanding the Testing Code of Ethics, and protocols and procedures, and analyzing data can lessen the stress when assessing our students. As a former principal, I understand the importance of interpreting and analyzing the data received from assessments. Oftentimes, our BTs do not know what to do with the data, how it can inform their classroom instruction. While this is a key role of the principal, I have that expertise to assist principals and beginning teachers with this type of support. Once a teacher, always a teacher; once a principal, always a principal. I will forever use the skills, knowledge, and wisdom I acquired as a beginning teacher and principal to guide our future educators.

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APPENDIX A: EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Administrator:

I am a doctoral student from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro conducting research on the principal's role in beginning teacher support in urban-characteristic elementary school settings. Because you serve in this type of elementary school setting, you have been selected to participate in this research study. Participation is voluntary.

The research study seeks to examine the role(s) principals play in supporting beginning teachers (BTs) in their first three years in the classroom in urban characteristic school districts. By participating in this study, you will be contributing to identifying the gaps that exist in literature and provide avenues to explore further how to assist beginning teachers in "hard-to-staff" schools. I also seek to equip principals with the strategies to maintain, nurture, coach, and support our beginning teachers. You will have an opportunity to indicate if you would like to participate in a telephone or Google Meeting to share your experiences of supporting beginning teachers. Principals will be asked to participate in 1-2 secured audio and video recorded interviews of 16 questions, dependent upon the participant's scheduled time. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Some artifacts may be collected from the administrator if applicable. Examples include, but are not limited to, email or letter correspondence to beginning teachers (monthly meetings, mentor/mentee meetings, book studies, opportunities for collaboration, wellness checks, etc.).

Important Information to Know about Being a Participant in this Study

1. **You do not have to participate.** Participation is completely voluntary.
2. **Pay.** There is no compensation for participation in this study.
3. **No Known Risks.** Although you are a current employee of District One, there are no risks to participating. District approval has been obtained.
4. **Your responses will be kept confidential.** The interview will be audio and video recorded. Because your voice and image will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. To maintain confidentiality, the following procedures will be used to collect data: coding, use of pseudonyms, and confidential responses. Data will be stored in the University's secured storage, Box @UNCG. This storage system is only accessible by the researcher, advisor, and university IRB staff.
5. **If you have any questions about this study,** please contact Ms. Kim Britt at hmbritt@uncg.edu/ (336) 587-6046 or Dr. Craig Peck, faculty advisor c_peck@uncg.edu/ 336-908-7262.

6. **If you have questions regarding your rights as a subject in this study**, you may contact the UNCG Office of Research Integrity at ori@uncg.edu.

To participate in this study, please kindly respond to this google survey for contact and preferred interview day(s)/time(s): <https://forms.gle/yBvZTiqBZQN5PnV78>

Thank you in advance,

Kim Britt, EdS

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INTERVIEW—PRINCIPALS’ SUPPORT OF BEGINNING
TEACHERS (GOOGLE FORM)

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Once you have completed your preferred day(s) and time(s), you will receive a Google Meet invitation from Ms. Britt. COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION OF THIS FORM SERVE AS CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.

2. Email:

3. Please type in your first and last name here and email if it is different than the email address used for this survey: _____

4. Please indicate your preferred day(s) for your interview. You may select more than one option.

____Monday

____Tuesday

____Wednesday

____Thursday

____Friday

____Saturday

____Sunday

5. Please indicate your desired time(s) for your scheduled interview. Please be as detailed as necessary to include specific dates you would prefer. I will confirm your day/time (via email). This google form gives us a starting point. Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Introductory Questions and Rapport Building

1. Please begin by telling me a little about your personal and educational background.
 - a. What was your educational experience like K-12, college, and beyond?
 - b. What demographic population are you most drawn to or believe most benefits from your leadership?
 - c. How many years have you been in education? How many of those years have you served as an elementary principal/administrator (in a Title I school)?
 - d. What are the demographics of your school? Number of students? Percentage of Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, Bi-racial, etc.? Percentage of reduced/free lunch?
2. Are you a Title I school?
 - a. Were you appointed to be principal of this school, or did you seek to become principal of this particular school?
 - b. When interviewing/seeking new staff or beginning teachers, what do you tell them about working in an urban setting?
 - c. What kind of response or feedback do you get from BTs about working in an urban school setting?

Let's talk more about your role as it applies to beginning teacher support at this school.

1. Please tell me about your background as it applies to your time spent as a building-level principal in an urban school. (Here, I may have to define “urban” as it applies to my research).
2. How many beginning teachers (BTs 1-3 years) do you currently have in your building?
 - a. How many are BT1s, 2s, 3s?
 - b. How many teachers remained after their first three years or while in their BT status?
 - c. What were their reasons for staying? What were their reasons for leaving?
3. Define and/or describe what teacher support, specifically beginning teacher support, looks like in your building? (This question may lend itself to answering questions 4 and 5; if not, proceed to those questions).
4. What role(s) do you play in this support of or with beginning teachers in their 1st, 2nd, and/or 3rd years in the classroom?
5. How effective (or not) do you believe your current support is for beginning teachers?
What evidence do you believe supports your response?
6. Has that support helped to decrease the teacher turnover among BTs in your building, especially in this urban school setting? If so, how?
7. (If the principal has worked in other non-urban school settings, ask question #7): Is the BT support any different working in an urban school than in a more affluent school setting? If yes, how so?

Now let's talk about the district expectations of a principal regarding support for your beginning teachers.

1. Are there any expectations or guidelines set by your district about how principals should provide support to beginning teachers?
 - A. For instance, are you expected to meet with them a certain number of times each quarter/year?
 - B. Are you expected to provide any orientation at the beginning of the year for them or any ongoing meetings during the year? If so, what does that look like in your school?
2. Do you think your beginning teachers see you only as an evaluator or someone they can talk to without repercussions (risk-free environment)? Can you provide an example where the latter may be the case?

Concluding Questions:

1. What do you feel are important factors/qualities principals should have in working with and retaining beginning teachers?
 - A. How have you used those factors/qualities in retaining your teachers?
2. What are some of the barriers to working in a Title I school with diverse populations? What are the advantages? Limitations?
3. What could the principal do to help lessen these barriers?
4. What kind of training prepared you to work in this type of school setting?
5. What kind of professional development might better equip you to handle some of the added stress with working in an urban school setting?
6. How do you recruit and retain quality teachers and staff in an urban school?

7. What advice can you offer to principals to support BTs in their schools?

Resources and Materials used to support beginning teachers

1. Are there any additional materials or resources that you use in your building to support your beginning teachers?
 2. May I review them and use them in my research if appropriate?
 3. What contributions can this research and educational leadership hopefully make toward retaining teachers in their beginning years in the classroom?
 4. In my literature review, I highlight recurring themes that are present in the research on this topic. To recap, they are school culture/climate, workload, mentorship, learning communities, BT induction or training, feedback and accessibility, and critical reflection. How would you rank the importance/priority of these themes in the lives of BTs? Please expand on your top three themes.
- Is there anything else that we did not cover or any additional thoughts you have that you would like to include?