

A Closer Look at Factors Surrounding Beginning Teacher Attrition

Honors Project

In fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Esther G. Maynor Honors College

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

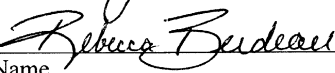
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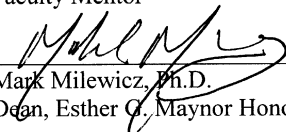
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Elementary Education

December 2, 2013


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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my five children, Logan, Savanna, Katherin, Arista and Jesse-James, who inspire me every day to be the best student and teacher I can possibly be. It is partly because of them that I felt it was extremely important for me to address the issue of beginning teachers leaving the classroom in such high numbers. Every child deserves the best teacher possible and it is my hope that we can help beginning teachers stay in the classroom and become the best they can for all of the children who need them.

Acknowledgments

First of all I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, without His guidance I would have been unable to have accomplished anything I have set out to accomplish.

I would like to acknowledge my many professors who have supported me throughout my time at UNCP; specifically Dr. Joe Scuilli, Dr. Steven Bourquin, Mrs. Rebecca Berdeau, Dr. Emily Long, Mrs. Kelly Ficklin, Dr. Mark Milewicz, Dr. Polina Chemishonova and Dr. Ashley Hope and Dr. Laura Staal, who helped to inspire me to explore this subject by their concern for this same subject. I would also like to acknowledge the UNCP Student Support Services, Mrs. Carolyn Godwin, Ms. Kimilla Floyd and Mrs. Brenda Locklear and Mr. Larry McCallum for all of the help they have given since I became a student at UNCP.

I would also like to acknowledge my family; my parents, my in-laws, my grandfather and my sisters whose constant support and love has helped me through this process. Whether it was providing child care, loaning me a vehicle or just listening to me vent.

Last but not list I would like to acknowledge my husband and my children. They are the ones who sacrificed time with me and extracurricular activities so that I could be a successful student. To my husband, thank you for shouldering extra responsibilities around the house and dealing with the long hours I spent on the computer so that I could focus on school. To my children, if it wasn't for you, I could have never done this. You have showed me that I am so much more than I ever thought I was. Hearing you brag on your mom and how good she does in school is the best motivation and reward ever.

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ABSTRACT

A CLOSER LOOK AT FACTORS SURROUNDING BEGINNING TEACHER'S

ATTRITION:

by,

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Elementary Education- Reading Concentration

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December 2013

Each year thousands of new teachers enter the classroom as recent college graduates. Statistics show that each year we lose high numbers of these professionals within the first five years of service. This study takes a closer look at some of the mitigating factors that influence the attrition rate of beginning teachers. This study reviews the results of studies conducted throughout the country and Canada as well as conducting a survey about the experiences of a cross section of new teachers. The primary areas of concern identified include college preparation, mentoring/induction programs and classroom management.

Literature Review

Each year thousands of pre-service teachers leave the colleges and universities of this country ready to venture into the public classroom. Each year a startling percentage of these new teachers leave the profession. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, it is estimated that 14% of all new teachers will leave the classroom after the first year, and 46 percent are gone within five years.(Fulton, 2005) Additional studies assert (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Perda, in press), that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave within the first five years of entry into teaching. Both statistics reveal a prevalent problem; that there is a disconnect between the role of a pre-service teacher and the role of a new teacher. This disconnect must be identified and addressed in order to reduce the attrition rate of beginning teachers and to assist them in becoming “irreplaceables”. According to a study published by TNTP (The New Teacher Project) ‘irreplaceables’ are teachers who are so successful they are nearly impossible to replace”(Jacobs, 2012).

Studies and surveys on this issue reveal startling results. Teachers cite a myriad of reasons for leaving the classroom. This study explores the factors that contribute to the attrition rate of beginning teachers including the areas of administrative support, induction programs, classroom management, state, LEA and individual school expectations, time management and college course preparation for the classroom.

Many school systems have some form of beginning teacher program that all new teachers within the LEA participate in. The Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study revealed that of beginning teachers who received a mentor 8% were not teaching in the following school year and 10% were not teaching by the second school year. These numbers were compared to 16% after the first year and 23% after the second year amongst beginning teachers who did not

receive a mentor (Kaiser, 2011). Mentoring programs provide beginning teachers with support during the transition into the classroom. These programs recognize the support needed by beginning teachers. Although many states require some form of induction program, many programs fall short of empowering new teachers in the classroom. While providing new teachers with a mentor is a step in the right direction, it is essential for schools to provide these teachers with an induction program that encompasses all aspects of the beginning years in the classroom. Assigning mentors based on convenience only, limited accessibility to the mentor, and ill prepared mentors contribute to the failure of many existing “induction” programs. The National Commission on teaching and America’s Future, identifies mentoring as merely a component of a successful induction program(Fulton,. 2005).

The expectations a teacher must meet in order to be considered a proficient teacher varies from state, to LEA, to school. Each state sets up the broad perimeters for which each school must operate within. Standards and objectives are established through each state. On top of the state requirements, the LEA’s place further restrictions upon the classroom teacher by dictating pacing guides in conjunction with the established state standards. Within an individual school a principal has the determining say on how a teacher will be able teach. A principal may dictate the manner in which a teacher sets up the classroom, the amount of time spent on each subject and the way any teacher assistants may be utilized. Beginning teachers often become disillusioned when they are unable to teach in the manner they see fit, and instead must meet the guidelines for all levels of administration.

Teachers who enter the classroom through traditional preparation remain in the classroom as teachers at higher rates than their professional counterparts who have entered the classroom through alternative methods. Alternatively licensed teachers are individuals who have obtained a

bachelor's degree in a discipline other than education. These individuals are permitted to enter the classroom as a teacher while they work towards their teaching certification. As a result of teacher shortages, various states have allowed individuals to enter the classroom through alternative methods. Although alternative licensing addresses the teacher shortage in the short term, these teachers leave the classroom at a higher rate than new teachers who received their licensing through traditional programs, thus lending to the importance of preservice preparations.

The Alberta Teachers' Association's Beginning Teachers' Five-Year Study (Servage, 2012), followed 98 beginning teachers over the course of 5 years. The study began with 135 participants but due to attrition, the participants dropped by 35% to 98 participants. This study revealed similar results to studies that have taken place throughout the US, Canada and various countries. The top challenge for beginning teachers is classroom management. According to Melnick & Meister, a 2004 Public Agenda survey found that 85 percent of teachers believed "new teachers are particularly unprepared for dealing with behavior problems in their classrooms" (p. 3). An additional survey of 500 teachers revealed that teachers with three year or less experience were more likely than experienced teachers to cite student behavior as a problem in their classrooms (Melnick & Meister, 2008). The results of the second survey showed that novice teachers were more than twice as likely, with 19% versus 7%, as their experienced counterparts to cite this as an issue.

The Future of Teaching in Alberta, (ATA, 2011) noted observations made by teachers concerning the college preparation and practicums. These teachers stated that the college preparation had failed to fully prepare beginning teachers for the reality of the classroom.

What factors contribute to the attrition rate of beginning teachers?

To better understand why new teachers leave the classroom at such high rates, a first wave survey was conducted. Participants identified information current for the 2013-2014 school year. Participants represented universities in three states. In this study 37 respondents participated in a beginning teacher survey. Participants answered a series of questions via survey monkey. The parameters established for participation in the survey required each participant to have been teaching in the classroom for less than five years. Through self-identification, participants identified age group, graduation date, degree obtained, schools and grades taught in, areas of highest concern and whether or not they plan to remain in the classroom in 5 years and whether or not they plan to remain in the classroom in 10 years.

In this study participants were asked to identify their age group, whether or not they attended a public or private university, their graduation date, how many years they have been teaching, and the schools and length of time in which they have taught at each. Participants were also asked to identify the areas they felt were the greatest challenge to them and the college courses that they felt most prepared them for the “real” classroom.

Participants of the survey varied in age from 21 years to 59 years. Majority of the participants identified themselves as being in the 21-29 year range (see figures 1 and 2).

Participants identified three avenues through which they obtained their teaching certification. 82.86% of respondents obtained their teaching license via a traditional undergraduate program, while 14.29% obtained it through lateral entry and 2.86% obtained a MAT in an educational field. (figure 3)

Respondents were asked to identify challenges faced as a new teacher and to rate the challenges on a scale of 1-8 with one being the greatest challenge. The challenge categories were; classroom management, time management, administration, lesson planning, curriculum/content, standardized testing, interaction with parents and other. Figure 3 shows the areas selected as the greatest challenge. Although the survey consisted of 37 participants a total of 40 answers were given for the greatest challenge faced within the classroom. One participant identified 3 areas as his or her greatest concern which accounts for the discrepancy of the number.

Of the 37 participants in the survey, 68% said they would be in teaching in five years, 24% said they did not see themselves in the classroom in 5 years and 8% were unsure of where they would be in five years. When asked the same question concerning 10 years in the future only 40% of respondents could see themselves in the classroom while 38% said they did not see themselves in the classroom in 10 years and 22% were unsure of whether or not they would remain in the classroom.

Of the 32% of respondents who said they would not be in the classroom or they were unsure in five years, 75% identified classroom management as one of their top five challenges as a new teacher. 50% of the total respondents identified classroom management as the top challenge faced as a beginning teacher. Participants were allowed to select more than one category as the greatest challenge. (see figure 4)

Among the respondents who said that they did not see themselves in the classroom or were unsure if they would be in the classroom in 10 years, 83% identified time management as one of their top five challenges in the classroom, 78% identified lesson planning, 78% identified curriculum and content, 72% identified classroom management, 61% identified interaction with

parents, 61% identified administration, and 56% identified standardized testing as the greatest challenge.

Respondents were asked to identify the college course(s) that most prepared them for the reality of the classroom. Participants were able to select more than one course. 37.14% of the participants identified classroom management courses as the best preparer. 37.14% identified content methods courses, 5.71% identified child development courses, 14.29% identified assessment courses, 11.43% identified instructional technology, 5.71% identified educational psychology, 25.71% identified differentiation, and 22.86% identified general education courses. An addition 11% said that they believed student teaching most prepared them and an additional 16% of the total participants felt that none of their college course prepared them for the realities of the classroom.

Summary and Suggestions

Looking at the results of this survey in conjunction with studies conducted through other organizations and examining programs geared towards supporting new teachers a better visual of solutions to help combat beginning teacher attrition. On the collegiate level pre-service teachers would benefit from more practicum experience. Within our study, respondents identified classroom management as their greatest challenge overall. During the practicum experience, preservice teachers have very limited practice with classroom management. Majority of the practicum experience consists of the preservice teacher enforcing a teachers classroom rules while the teacher sits in the classroom correcting inappropriate behaviors. Simply teaching a thirty minute or one hour lesson and then leaving the classroom does not show the reality of managing a classroom. In order for preservice teachers to receive a better understanding of classroom management it is a necessity for them to have authentic experiences in which they are

responsible for classroom management. By providing more in depth, hands on experience, teacher preparation programs can help pre-service teachers have a better understanding on classroom management. Although current teacher preparation programs require field observations, majority of pre-service teachers do not experience the full responsibility of classroom management until they complete their internship.

In an anonymous interview with teachers in the first two years of teaching, the teachers gave insightful feedback and suggestions based on their experiences with classroom management. The group of teachers was equally divided between those who completed their internship in the spring and those who completed it in the fall semester. Teachers who completed the spring internship felt that they did not have a chance to establish their own classroom management style. These teachers felt that they simply took over the existing set up and followed through with the clinical teacher's format. One teacher said that she wished she would have been able to work side by side with her teacher in the fall to have an actual feel for how a well-managed classroom was established in the beginning of the year.

Of the teachers who completed their internship in the fall semester expressed that while they did feel they were able to see how the classroom was established the degree of their inclusion in the classroom management style varied from one clinical teacher to another. This was a sentiment expressed by all of the beginning teachers in the interview.

The selection of clinical teachers for the internship period must be more rigorous. One beginning teacher shared that she felt completely unprepared to teach because her clinical teacher did not allow her to "teach" the class. The beginning teacher said that she was never allowed to try new ideas, her own rules, her own schedule when in the internship. She said that she was never allowed to develop her own plans, but that all lessons were dictated to her. She

said that “I felt completely clueless on what to do when I started in my own classroom.” In contrast another beginning teacher stated that he felt very well prepared for his classroom because his clinical teacher gave him as much freedom as he wanted to turn the classroom into his own.

Some clinical teachers welcome the chance to be a teacher to the college student they are assigned while others treat the intern as an inconvenience. Many new teachers feel that their internship is what prepared them the most for the reality of their own classroom. Matching student teachers with good clinical teachers must take place in order to help ensure that new teachers have the confidence needed as they enter their own classrooms.

Once in the classroom, local schools and LEA’s can help to decrease the attrition rate by providing comprehensive induction programs. Merely supplying a new teacher with a mentor is not enough. According to Smith, and Ingersoll, (2004), providing a mentor only increases the retention of new teachers by 1% over a five year period. Successful induction programs should consist of working with a mentor, open communication with administration, participation in a seminar for beginning teachers, common planning time with other teachers in the same subject, a reduced course load, and assistance from a classroom aide.(Ingersoll, 2012) Beginning teachers who receive such an induction program are less than half as likely to leave the classroom after the first year than beginning teachers who did not participate in an induction program.

Comprehensive induction programs in Santa Cruz, California, WallaWalla, Washington and southern Illinois have boasted retention rates of greater than 90% over 6, 5 and 3 year periods. (Frye, 2007)

As a result of budget cuts many LEA’s have eliminated one on one mentors for beginning teachers. Many have initiated programs that assign one mentor to several schools. The mentor is

responsible for overseeing all new teachers within his or her assigned schools. In the anonymous interview with new teachers, one teacher expressed extreme frustration over the lack of access to her mentor. The teacher said that she felt isolated within her school, and that she felt it was sink or swim.

New teachers must receive a network of support. Each new teacher must be inducted into a community of learning that at a minimum must consist of mentors, access to supportive administration, and appropriate training of all school policies. It is not enough to say “welcome to our school, this is our handbook, good luck!” Schools must be supportive of new teacher development. A new teacher’s training does not end when they walk across a stage at commencement. The first three years of a teacher’s career should be treated as a residency similar to those we see in the medical field. In the medical field individuals become doctors upon graduation from medical school, however they are not expected to go out and take full responsibility for patients. While they practice medicine, it is under the guidance of more experienced doctors. In order for our beginning teachers to be successful, induction programs that embrace this concept are necessary.

Conclusion

Educators are a part of a profession that is essential to the success of our future. Every professional sits in his or her current position because of educators who took part in helping the individual succeed. In order to continue to have highly qualified teachers in the classroom, we must reduce the attrition rate of new teachers in order for these individuals to become experienced professionals. In order to reduce the attrition rate amongst beginning teachers, pre-service teachers must have a better grasp on classroom management and the expectations they will face once they are in the classroom. New teachers must receive support from colleagues,

administration and LEA's in order for them to be successful in their first few years of teaching. Schools and LEA's must create a system that assists new teachers in becoming "irreplaceable" teachers. When something is broken we must fix it. Based on the figures for the attrition rate of new teachers nationwide we have a broken system that loses teachers before they have even had the chance to become great teachers.

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Appendix A

Figure 1

Age Range	Percentage/number of respondents
21-29	64.86% 24
30-39	16.22% 6
40-49	13.51% 5
50-59	5.41% 2
60 or older	0% 0
Total	37

Q1 Which category below includes your age?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 0

Figure 2

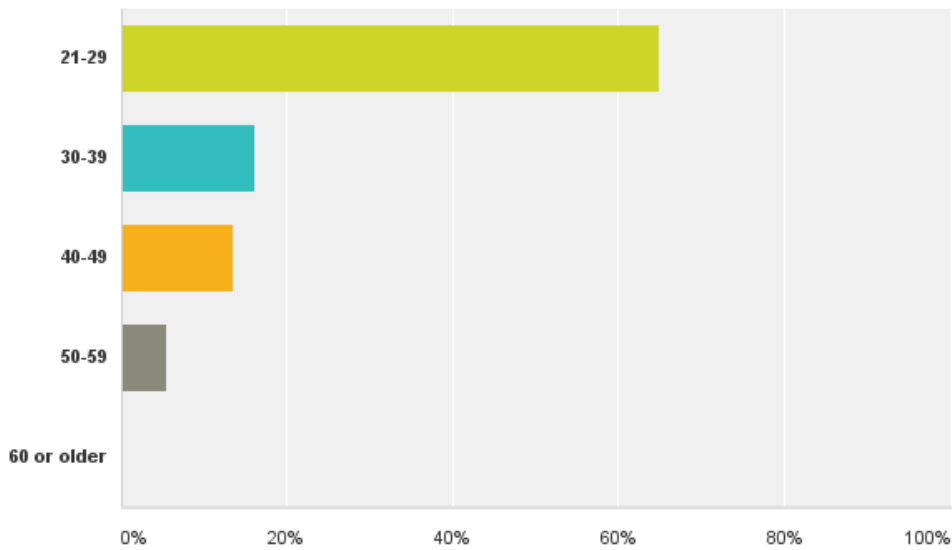
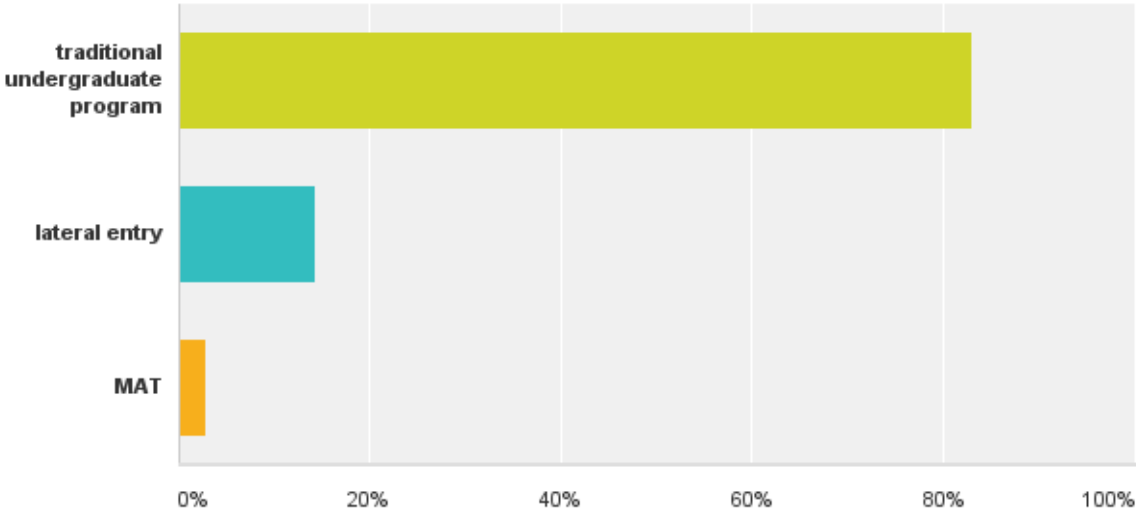


Figure 3

Q3 Through which method did you obtain your teaching license?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 2



Greatest challenges faced by teachers

Figure 4

