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## Principals' Perceived Influence over New Teacher Retention

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Principals' Perceived Influence over New Teacher Retention

A Dissertation Presented

by

MEREDITH BERTRAND COATES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Teacher Education & School Improvement



Principals' Perceived Influence over New Teacher Retention

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Carol and Al Bertrand, whose love, support,  
and pride allowed me to build the career I have now.

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I am so very thankful to all of the people who have supported this project, and I am extremely proud of the high expectations and the quality of education that I have received at Umass. I sincerely thank the principals who participated in this study and in the pilot studies. Your insights, humor, dedication, and leadership has taught me some of the most valuable lessons that I have learned in all of my years in higher education.

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what is precious, and what it means to be loving parents, caring friends, and the most generous people I know. I love you and thank you, forever.

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## ABSTRACT

### PRINCIPALS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OVER NEW TEACHER RETENTION

FEBRUARY 2015

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Studies report that nearly a third of novice teachers leave the field before their third year of service (Ingersoll, 2002), and almost half of novice teachers leave the field before completing their fifth year of service (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, 2004). These rates of turnover have remained steady (NCES, 2011). Schools are workplaces where teachers face a multitude of factors that collectively contribute to job satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Generally, research has indicated that administrative support has a profound effect on the experiences of new teachers (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine 6 principals' perceptions of the main factors behind teacher retention statistics and their personal perceptions of their role as a factor in the career decisions of new teachers. In-depth interviewing will investigate the following research questions: To what extent do the principals identify with the new teacher experience? What do principals perceive to be the main factors behind high attrition rates for new teachers, and to what extent do principals believe that new teacher retention is important? What do the principals do to support new teachers in schools, and how is this effort affected by their perceptions of the research on new teacher retention or



contextual variables? Results indicated that the participating principals believed that new teacher retention was a crucial component of school functioning, and they generally perceived themselves to have a great deal of influence over new teacher job satisfaction and eventual retention. More specifically, it was evident that the participants do intentionally try to retain good teachers on both direct and indirect levels.

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions .....	6
Significance of the Study .....	7
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	9
Introduction.....	9
Discussion of Terms .....	10
Factor Analysis .....	13
Introduction.....	13
Salary Factors.....	14
Demographic Variables .....	18
Mentorship and Induction .....	22
Perceived Efficacy/Workload .....	25
Working Conditions/Job Security .....	28
Workplace Organization .....	29
Principal Behavior/Influence .....	31
Conclusion .....	36
3. METHODOLOGY .....	38
Theoretical Framework.....	38
The Metaphor.....	38
The Theory.....	39
Research Questions.....	41
Setting and Participants.....	41

	Gaining Entry and Informed Consent .....	42
	Phenomenological Design .....	44
	Pilot Study 1 .....	45
	Pilot Study 2 .....	47
	Research Perspective .....	49
	Data Collection and Analysis .....	49
	Trustworthiness .....	49
	Limitations .....	50
4.	RESULTS .....	52
	Identification with the New Teacher Experience .....	52
	Identification with the Work of a New Teacher .....	53
	Emulated Leadership Skills .....	58
	Perception of the Main Factors of New Teacher Retention/Attrition .....	59
	Principals' Effort to Retain Teachers Is Intentional .....	60
	Retention as Crucial to School Functioning .....	60
	Principals' Belief that They Have Influence over New Teacher Retention .....	62
	The Hiring Process is Crucial to Retention Efforts .....	63
	Proper Support Is What Makes Teachers Stay in the Field .....	65
	Proper Support is What Leads to Retention .....	66
	New Teachers Need a Great Deal of Support .....	67
	Perceived Lack of Administrative Training on Issues/Effects of New Teacher Attrition .....	69
	"Good" Teaching Has Many Definitions .....	70
	Principals' Efforts Are Affected by Their Perceptions .....	75
	Direct, Personal Support .....	76
	Systemic Support .....	78
	Support for Outside Factors .....	81

Summary.....	84
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	85
Conclusion .....	88
Areas for Future Research .....	89
APPENDICES	
A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION .....	91
B. LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT.....	92
C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	93
D. CODING ORGANIZATION CHART .....	96
REFERENCES .....	99

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Participant Demographics .....	43

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Principal Influence over New Teacher Experience in a Workplace .....	40
2. Principal Influence over New Teacher Experience in a Workplace .....	86

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Current teacher attrition rates continue to weaken America public schools. Foundational studies report that 29% of novice teachers leave the field before their third year of service, and 39% of novice teachers leave the field before their fifth year of service (Ingersoll, 2002). These rates of turnover have remained steady (NCES, 2011). This attrition cycle undercuts the foundations of any long-term reform initiatives and unsteadies the platform of any school's success.

In the wake of the No Child Left Behind legislation, which had the financial and political backing strong enough to potentially touch the lives of every public school teacher and student in the nation, a clear result has emerged. The rigorous mandates have not lead to increased student achievement (NAEP, 2011). The NCLB Act (2002) has managed to control the figurative and literal voices of every teacher in every public school classroom for 12 years, yet the whirlpool continues to pull the life and the energy from the academic achievement levels of America's children, and the achievement gaps between whites and non-whites have remained steady (NAEP, 2011). The NCLB political standardization and pressures have even further contributed to the alienation of hundreds of thousands of teachers, and millions of children. The final years of the NCLB act have left millions of people feeling disenfranchised from their right to give and receive effective schooling.

Before NCLB, American public schools were struggling to meet the needs of a diverse national student population. Today, the same struggle remains. Teachers are

charged with the task of meeting all academic and emotional needs of individual learners, and public schools are weighed-down in heavy bureaucratic mechanisms which stifle teacher autonomy and creativity. This dynamic, at both macro and micro levels, have created suffocating environments for teachers, especially for new teachers who are most at risk for attrition or migration from their first teaching positions.

Schools are struggling to become viable workplaces where, at the most fundamental level, teachers can teach and children can learn. These invasive problems in contemporary American public education continue to drive excellent teachers out of the field. Despite the rigor of practical training programs, teachers are exhausted by the “sheer cumulative impact of multiple, complex, non-negotiable innovations on teachers’ time, energy, motivation, opportunities to reflect, and their very capacity to cope.” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 6). Therefore, teacher attrition is both a cause and an effect of the struggles of American schools.

As America reaches the end of the NCLB effort, and as researchers begin to process the results and move on to other plans for reformation, it is crucial that the educational system pay particularly close attention to the issue of teacher retention. Keeping qualified teachers in the field is what all children need. Richard Ingersoll writes in a 2002 analysis of teacher turnover:

[Schools] are unusually dependent on commitment, continuity and cohesion among employees and are therefore especially prone to suffer when subjected to high rates of employee turnover. From this perspective, high rates of teacher turnover are problematic not only because they may indicate underlying problems in how well schools are functioning but also because, in and of themselves, they can disrupt the quality of school cohesion and performance. (Ingersoll, 2002)



Of all of the research on teacher attrition, one factor that continues to bubble to the surface is the quality of leadership from schools' administrations. Although many other factors contribute to teachers' career decisions, principal or school leadership is believed to have a great deal of influence over how those factors are perceived by teachers (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Smethem, 2007; Weiss, 1999). What makes a principal "excellent" or "effective" is as abstract as the qualities of an "excellent" teacher. However, effective leadership must be accepted by researchers as the leading contributing factor for teacher retention, just as the leading factor for children's academic achievement has been attributed to the quality of the individual teacher (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2005).

Secondary to the negative impact on student performance are the monetary costs of teacher turnover. Unhealthy attrition and turnover negatively affect student learning. This makes the costs of teacher attrition a devastating and exhausting challenge for educators and administrators who are trying to improve teacher quality and student performance, especially in struggling schools where reform is both desperately needed and virtually impossible.

Leaking, unnoticed, from district and school funds are all of the costs accrued in the process of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers. In 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future released a report which calculated the cost of teacher turnover in five school districts. The findings were that turnover held significant financial consequences at both the district and the school level, and that those monetary burdens deserve direct, systematic scrutiny in order to expose the monetary effect of turnover. Whenever a teacher leaves, the schools/districts take on the

responsibility of paying for the recruitment, hiring, and training of a new teacher. The cost for each individual “leaver” ranged from \$4,366 in a small district, to \$17,872 in a large city district (NCTAF, 2007). The Texas Center for Educational Research (2000) calculates that after all of the human resources costs of recruiting, hiring, conducting criminal background checks, and completing new-employee paperwork, the cost is at least \$8,000 for each person who decides to leave his/her teaching position. These statistics are varied across states and districts, but they are all fiscally significant. Consideration must also be made for the cost of the pre-service education of teachers, much of which is funded with government and state subsidies.

Exact costs and numbers of teacher attrition are difficult to measure. Teachers make up an enormous four percent of the entire civilian workforce in America. Teachers’ jobs are often governed by local economies, and the work of the school teacher varies by region, district, subject, grade level, and personal philosophy. These intricacies create a very diverse workforce, one that has been examined again and again with various measurement tools and research criteria.

Large-scale analysis on the topic of teacher turnover is readily available because many states willingly provide data about the migration of the teachers whom they employ/ed. The data are often complete with identifiers and demographic information which make the data easy to striate and cross-tabulate for information on subgroups and follow-up data (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006). These data are then combined to create meta-analytical data bases for the purpose of national data collection. However, recently these meta-analytic methods have shown to be limited in describing the

contemporary needs of this diverse workforce. In part, the complications that cloud the data on teacher retention and attrition are due to the following factors:

- Permanent and annual attrition show different results and have very different implications for educators at different levels. One fourth to one third of teachers return at some point (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993).
- There are many subgroups of teachers: Gender, specialized fields, age, ethnicity, level of preparedness, personal characteristics, etc.
- The terms “attrition” and “turnover” are often used and measured interchangeably, skewing local implications.
- Effective and ineffective teachers are included in teacher retention data. It is very difficult to control for teacher quality in the analysis of turnover.

To expand upon the fourth point, it should be noted that this body of research on recruitment and retention of teachers is plagued with the knowledge that, unfortunately, there is no way to predict whether or not recruitment and retention efforts would actually improve student learning outcomes. Educators can only theorize that increasing teacher retention would improve student learning outcomes on a macro level. Educators, administrators, and policy makers invested in school performance should be careful not to implement teacher retention policies that would not account for quality. Ineffective teachers should not be retained.

Because the body of literature on new teacher retention statistics is so enormous, much of the research focuses on specific striations of the complex, multivariate factors influencing the career decisions of new teachers, in order to narrow the scope. This strategy sheds some light on the factors behind the teacher attrition problem, but it does

not provide a panoramic picture of the new teacher experience. What is needed is a demonstration of how the macro view of teacher retention factors interacts with an individual case.

In light of the complexities that make the teacher attrition dynamic so multifaceted and difficult to translate into policy, this study aims to show how principals, on a micro level, positively or negatively influence teacher retention in their respective schools. More specifically, this study investigates whether or not principals intentionality make an effort to retain good teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine six principals' perceptions of the main factors behind teacher retention statistics, and their personal perceptions of their role as a factor in the career decisions of new teachers. First, the principals' own lived experiences as new teachers was examined. Second, the principals' own perceptions of teacher retention statistics on a national and local level was examined, specifically examining their own perceived level of control over the retention rate of new teachers in their respective schools. Third, the ways in which the principals put these perceptions into action was analyzed and described.

### **Research Questions**

The in-depth interviews focused on the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the principals identify with the new teacher experience?

2. What do principals perceive to be the main factors behind high attrition rates for new teachers, and to what extent do principals believe that new teacher retention is important?
3. In what ways do the principals support new teachers in schools, and how is this effort affected by their perceptions of the research on new teacher retention or contextual variables?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, this study incorporates all aspects of the teacher retention/attrition literature and examines how principals translate this information into action as they work to retain good teachers in their schools.

Second, research on principal behaviors that support new teachers is burgeoning. Many different types of supportive behaviors and management styles have been identified as having connections to teacher retention rates. This research supports the shift of focus from the teacher experience to the investigation of the experiences, training, and successes of school leaders. A postmodern theoretical tool, charting the influence of principal behavior on the new teacher experience, is introduced.

Third, while most of the body of research on new teacher retention and attrition focuses on the way the factors indirectly affect the career decisions of new teachers, this study investigates whether or not principals with relatively low attrition rates of new teachers make direct appeals to the career decisions of those new teachers, (telling new teachers that they are valued, and offering to provide any support necessary to keep them retained in their teaching position), and whether or not the principals believe that these

direct appeals make any difference in the overall retention rates within their various, respective schools. This direct dialogue may prove to have an influence on the way the teachers perceive their worth in the school, and may increase the likelihood of their seeking out support during times of professional and personal struggle

Fourth, as legislators begin to lift the constraints of the NCLB initiative, and education boards across the country find themselves unleashed and humbled, new plans will need to be made. This is a crucial time to investigate how effective school leaders can affect the phenomenon of teacher attrition. This research investigates to what degree principals incorporate the multivariate, burgeoning body of research on new teacher retention into their support structure for new teachers, especially in the aftermath of the NCLB effort. This study is significant because it goes beyond the extensive body of research on the hardships that new teachers face, and it asks what school leaders, if given the proper resources, can do about them.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The teaching profession in America is enormous, employing close to three million college graduates (Loeb & Reininger, 2004). Studies report that nearly a third of novice teachers leave the field before their third year of service (Ingersoll, 2002), and almost half of novice teachers leave the field before completing their fifth year of service (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, 2004). These statistics have remained steady (NCES, 2011). These high percentages make up a very large proportion of the teaching workforce, indicating that attrition affects a very significant number of teachers, schools, and communities.

There are many reasons why teachers decide to leave their respective teaching positions, and many of those factors are well documented in literature. The research pool on the factors involved with teacher retention and attrition is ever-expanding when all factors are considered.

Perhaps the most comprehensive literature review on teacher retention to date was written by Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) as a part of The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, sponsored by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This comprehensive review covers all documented areas of factors which relate, either directly or indirectly, to the dynamic of teacher recruitment, retention, and attrition. In some cases, they suggest that larger samples are needed, and, in other cases, they suggest that comparative, qualitative data would also be helpful in catching some of the differences of needs within teacher subgroups (Johnson et al., 2005).

Despite clear, emergent, themes in the investigation of factors that associate with teacher retention, and despite the multitude of suggested research avenues and techniques offered forth by experts, there is no clear next-step for educators or researchers in terms of seeking a national remedy for the teacher attrition problem.

This chapter investigates seven branches of literature which relate to the career choices of novice teachers and attempts to draw upon both qualitative and quantitative research to highlight common themes that shape the phenomenon of exodus among novice teachers. First, relevant terms will be defined for use within this chapter and in subsequent analyses. Second, emergent factors in the body literature on teacher attrition/retention cycles will be investigated individually, including *Salary*, *Demographic Variables*, *Mentorship and Induction*, *Perceived Self Efficacy/ Workload*, *Working Conditions/ Job Security*, and *Workplace Organization*. Finally, a seventh factor, *Principal Behavior/ Influence*, will be examined in relation to the other factors affecting teacher retention/attrition, and implications will be drawn from the analysis, specifically articulating that the actions of principals may have more influence over new teacher retention than any combination of the five other factors that may be at work in any given school.

### **Discussion of Terms**

*Retention* refers to the cases in which a teacher stays in a school/workplace from one academic year to the next.

*Attrition* and *turnover* have been used interchangeably as indicators of a teacher's career decisions to leave his/her teaching position. However, there is an important



distinction between the terms. *Attrition* refers to a teacher's decision to leave the profession entirely. *Turnover* refers to a worker's decision to leave his/her teaching position for another teaching position in different workplace. Although turnover statistics may seem more benign than attrition statistics (because teachers who "turnover" generally stay in the teaching field), it is important to acknowledge the negative effects that turnover has on the schools/districts that were left behind. For individual schools/district, whether the teacher decides to stay in the profession or leave altogether, the effect on the abandoned school is the same. Therefore, both teacher turnover and teacher attrition are equally as destructive to a school setting, where interpersonal relationships with colleagues and children are a crucial component to development and achievement (Ingersoll, 2002).

*Teacher migration* and *mobility* are also terms that are used in the literature to represent teachers who move from one teaching position to another. Whether or not this migration counts as *attrition* is dependent upon the context of the study. What might be considered "attrition" for a specific school or district might simply be "turnover" or "migration" or "mobility" from a larger vantage point because the teacher may accept another teaching position in a different area.

*Job satisfaction* is a term defined by the eventual outcome of a teacher's career decision. *Job satisfaction* and *job dissatisfaction* have been used in research to holistically assess the cumulative factors that affect a teacher's decision to leave or stay. There are many factors which lead to *job satisfaction* or *job dissatisfaction*, and the studies vary in their elaboration on the components of the terms. Statistically, in studies

which use this term, job dissatisfaction leads to turnover and attrition, and job satisfaction generally leads to retention (Bacharach & Buamberger, 1990).

The term, *Teacher Shortage*, also deserves clarification because this term has been disputed by educators. *Teacher Shortage* is commonly used in reference to the districts/schools in areas that have difficulty filling the classroom teaching positions. The term, *Teacher Shortage*, implies that there are not enough available teachers to fill the teaching positions and suggests that recruitment of new teachers into the workforce would satiate the struggling schools. However, research indicates that the problem of teacher shortage has less to do with an actual shortage of teachers, and is more a result of the turnover and attrition of teachers who decide to leave struggling districts. Therefore, the term *teacher shortage* should be understood as a function of the turnover and attrition cycles that plague underperforming districts. Teacher shortage is not caused by an actual lack of available teachers, it is a problem with a school's/district's/region's ability to support and retain competent teachers (Ingersol, 2002; McCreight, 2000,).

*Healthy attrition* is attrition that is necessary to the overall function of a workplace. Healthy attrition of incompetent or inefficient workers may lead to higher levels of efficiency within organizations, and it may lead to more stable long-term development. *Unhealthy attrition* is attrition that is not beneficial to workplaces. When quality employees leave the workplace, the organization suffers from the loss of expertise of that individual, and the costs of recruiting and training a replacement can be high. Studies indicate that most school attrition is unhealthy (Borman & Dowling, 2008), causing considerable instability for the teaching and learning process.

*Principal*, in this case, is the term being used to describe any school leader whose job it is to support and retain teachers in the school.

The term *novice* can be used interchangeably with *new* in this discussion to define a teacher who has been teaching for fewer than three full academic years.

## **Factor Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Jianping Shen (1997) helped define two main branches of research on teacher retention by explaining that there are two approaches to studying this phenomenon. The first approach is a theoretical analysis of teacher retention statistics that is organized by economic theories of labor markets, such as supply and demand theories, human capital theory (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993), and “opportunity cost” theories. The theories assume, basically, that if the benefits outweigh the costs, then teachers will be more likely to enter the field of teaching. As a way to offset opportunity costs, according to labor market theory, a teacher “shortage” can be ameliorated by increasing wage. The labor market theory has been very helpful in highlighting some trends in the relationship between salary rates and retention of teachers, and those will be discussed in the next section.

The second approach to the study of teacher retention is a bivariate examination of retention/attrition statistics as they relate to factors such as salary, gender, ethnicity, and subject specialization (Shen, 1997). This type of analysis is what has helped define some common and widely accepted trends in teacher retention statistics. For example, the literature on teacher retention/attrition draws a distinct pattern of attrition which

correlates with years of service. When plotted against age or experience, results clearly indicate that teacher attrition follows a U-shaped pattern, with the highest attrition occurring with the youngest/newest teachers and also with the most experienced/oldest teachers who are nearing retirement age (Guarino et al., 2006; Kirby & Grissmer, 1993).

This analysis, following Shen's divisions, will begin with a description of the Salary factors influencing teacher attrition/retention, and then move to individual analyses of the other emergent, thematic factors.

### **Salary Factors**

Perhaps the most misunderstood factor affecting teacher dissatisfaction is the issue of salary rates. While it is common knowledge that teaching is not a highly paid profession relative to other professions with equal levels of education, the notion that good teachers can be retained by allocating more funds to their salary scale is inaccurate and misinformed. Due to these public misunderstandings of teacher salary issues and the complexities of this body of research, salary was included in this analysis despite the fact that principals have little direct control over actual salary schedules for teachers. However, the implications for principals will be presented, and the emphasis on salary increases as a retention measure will be argued.

When analyzing this issue in context with the general economic labor market as it applies to teachers, research has indicated that increased salaries do improve retention rates. In 1989 and 1990, Richard Murnane et.al. produced reports which showed clear connections between increased salary rates of novice teachers and increased teaching time for those research participants. Other research has supported the claim that annual

salary rates positively correlated with teacher retention (Shen, 1997; Stinebrickner, 1998, 2002).

Murnane and Olsen and Murnane, Singer, and Willett provided evidence that new teachers are sensitive to higher salaries. The teachers involved in these studies, who earned salaries which were slightly higher than average new teacher salaries stayed, on average, two to three years longer in the classroom. There were variations between the sensitivities to salary increases among the subgroups: secondary teachers tended to be more sensitive to salary increases than did elementary teachers, and newer teachers were more affected by salary increases than teachers with more years of experience (Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Murnane et al., 1989). Guarino et al. (2006) synthesized empirical research on teacher recruitment and retention. The main findings, as they related to teacher salary/compensation, were that higher salaries generally improved retention rates (Guarino et al., 2006).

However, the issue of salary rates for teachers is very complex. While it is true that teachers want better pay, simply paying them more would not necessarily improve retention rates (Feng, 2009) or teacher quality. Furthermore, with the strict, inflexible structure of district budgets, the cost of increasing salary rates is simply not feasible at the district, state, or national level.

Clearly, however, it is evident that salary rates are important factors in the lives and careers of teachers (Kirby, Nataraj, & Grissmer, 1993). Still unclear, though, is a helpful translation of this information into clear, effective policy. The author of this paper does not aim to downplay the importance of the reexamination of issuing higher salaries to teachers. However, adding more money to this complex teacher retention equation may

not, in the end, have any significant effect on student learning. Salary increases, if they are to be employed as a means of improving retention rates, must be teamed with other non-salary programs such as effective induction, formative mentorship, and clinical supervision. Without these partnerships, the role of salary increases is an expensive and indirect means to the ultimate goal: increased student achievement.

Other research, however, has concluded the opposite: that salary rate is negatively correlated with teacher attrition. There is a wide body of literature which provides evidence that teachers are generally intrinsically motivated, and that salary rates are only one factor of attrition outcomes. Therefore, there is fission between the camp of research which shows an undeniable connection between teacher dissatisfaction and salary rate, and the camp which describes research that shows how salary rate is secondary to other, more intrinsic variables that affect the new teacher experience. This fission can perhaps be explained by noting that there is an inherent flaw in the application of the “opportunity cost” theory to the analysis of new teachers: Built into the “opportunity cost” theory (defined as: what must be given up in order accept a teaching position) (Shen, 1997) is the assumption that new teachers enter the field with a clear understanding of the salary scale, knowing the dynamic of schools as workplaces, and having already weighed the cost benefits of becoming a teacher.

There is evidence which shows, however, that new teachers are not fully aware of the work that teaching entails before they enter their first teaching position. Kirby and Grissmer (1993), in a large-scale report on teacher attrition, found that young teachers enter the field with a great deal of uncertainty about the parameters of their work duties and their salary in relation to other professions. Kirby and Grissmer theorize that the

acquisition of some work experience in a school setting often acts a catalyst to cause the new teacher to reevaluate his/her work in relation to the salary scale. This new knowledge and understanding, Kirby and Grissmer conclude, could explain why new teachers seem to be more sensitive to salary scale than do mid-career and veteran teachers in their study (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993), and could also explain some of the varying nuances of the issue of salary as it relates to teacher job satisfaction/ dissatisfaction.

Perceptions of salary cannot be perfectly measured without a more linear, chronological analysis to measure the intensity of other factors throughout the duration of the school year. As the school year moves forward for new teachers, and the struggles intensify, salary begins to take on new relational relevance. This phenomenon also adds complexity to the measurement of other aspects of new teachers' experiences as they progress through many levels of development and needs during the first year/s of teaching.

To add another layer of complexity to this issue, Kirby and Grissmer revealed that the majority of teachers who had left the teaching profession (with the exception of young teachers) reported that a significant increase in salary would not have changed their decision to attrite. However, when asked what was the single most important factor in the efforts to retain good teachers, over half of the participants mentioned higher salaries. Therefore, the teachers were clear to state that salary was an important factor in overall retention efforts, but they were less likely to state that salary was one of their own personal reasons for leaving the field. This report continues to be foundational in the examination of salary rate as it applies to new teachers as a subgroup and is a major contribution to the description of this multifaceted and complex issue.

Furthermore, it is important to note that, for the studies that do support the notion that teacher retention is linked to salary concerns, the concerns are usually coupled with other aspects of the work which make the salary schedule unacceptable. Commutes, work conditions, lack of support, and overloaded teaching assignments usually offer new teachers a new perspective on their salary. Therefore, although salary schedules are often not under the control of public school administrations, there is much evidence to support the notion that workplace conditions can affect how salary is weighed in the minds of the teachers.

### **Demographic Variables**

*Student Demographics:* The pattern of attrition and turnover is particularly devastating for lower-income schools, which tend to bear the most extreme attrition statistics (Ingersol, 2001; Moore Johnson, 2004; Shen, 1997). Research indicates that student demographic variables positively correlate with turnover and attrition statistics in particular districts and regions. Conversely, high attrition statistics in any given city or district can often indicate poor working conditions for teachers, and poor working conditions often link to an impoverished community (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993).

Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin (2004) conducted a study using the Texas statistical panel which matched student/teacher demographics. The study examined the factors which affect the turnover and attrition statistics in the Texas public schools, specifically comparing the effects of salary vs. student population variables. The results indicated that teacher mobility is much more strongly correlated with student demographic variables, student achievement, and racial statistics than it is with salary schedules, especially for



younger teachers. The authors warn, however, that workplace conditions within particular schools may be the motivating factors for teacher mobility, and that the demographic variables may simply be an unintended relation (Hanushek, et al., 2004).

Similarly, Linda Darling-Hammond, Susanna Loeb, and John Luczak (2005) concluded that, despite the strong evidence showing that an impoverished student population is positively correlated with attrition of teachers, there has been little effort to unpack the connections between poverty of the student population and the working conditions in the school. The authors suggest that the poor working conditions in impoverished schools may be more directly linked to the attrition rates than the demographic statistics of the student population (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Schools that serve impoverished children are often also characterized by more difficult working conditions, lack of supplies, lack of technology, etc. Although student demographics are an indicator of probable teacher attrition, the working conditions within those schools present a more feasible link to attrition rates.

Therefore, there is evidence to support the notion that student demographic variables are positively correlated to attrition and turnover rates (Darling-Hammond et.al, 2005; Goldhaber, Gross, & Player, 2007), but there is also evidence which questions those correlations, positing that student demographic variables may be an indirect link to teacher attrition, and that the real problem exists within the workplace. If this is the case, then school leadership plays an even more crucial role in the work experiences for teachers who choose to teach in needy schools.

*Teacher Demographics:* Studies have also examined the demographic statistical patterns of teachers for any correlation with attrition and turnover rates. Stockard and

Lehman (2004) studied the influences on the satisfaction and retention of first-year teachers. For the purpose of this analysis, the most important finding in this study was the fact that teachers' demographic statistics did not correlate with their career decisions (Stockard et al., 2004). Other studies show that minority teachers are more likely to stay in teaching longer than white teachers (Ingersol, 2001; Stinebrickner, 2001).

Research indicates that teachers prefer to teach in, and are more likely to remain in teaching positions that are in their own communities (Loeb & Reininger, 2004). This finding has specific implications for hard-to-staff schools; that the recruiting and hiring efforts put forth by the principal may be a crucial key to raising retention rates in hard-to-staff schools.

Despite the steady evidence which shows the novice years of teaching as being the years during which attrition decisions are most likely, some studies have indicated mid-career vulnerabilities as well. Rosenholtz and Simpson, (1990) discovered a mid-career "crisis" period for teachers during which the work environment conditions could either bridge a transition to a committed career, or cause the teacher to lower commitment levels and/or leave the field. Huberman (1993) similarly identified another set of years which posed a "danger zone" in the career cycle of teachers. Huberman found that teachers between their seventh and tenth years of teaching often faced a period of indecision about their plans to remain in teaching. Borman and Dowling (2008) report that environmental and personal influences on teachers' career decisions are prone to change over time or years in service. These studies support the notion that teachers at different levels of their career have very different needs within the school workplace. Rosenholtz concludes that careful principal response is crucial during these periods of

indecision and lack of motivation, and that over-aggressive management can drive teachers away.

A particularly discouraging demographic trend that has arisen in this body of literature is the evidence that high-ability teachers tend to leave teaching at a higher rate (Feng, 2005; Guarino et al., 2006), or they tend to not enter teaching at all. Stinebrickner, (2001), using SAT scores as a measure, found that high-ability teachers were more likely to leave teaching sooner than those teachers with lower scores on the SAT. Henke, Chen, and Geis, (2000) determined that teachers who scored in the top quartile on their College Entrance Exam were twice as likely to leave their teaching position as teachers who scored in the lowest quartile. Studies also show that teachers who are less qualified to teach are more likely to accept teaching positions in needier schools, which are associated with poorer working conditions and more difficult teaching workloads (Loeb & Reininger, 2004). Consequently, the lower performing teachers are more likely to attrite or turnover in these workplace environments, as are their more competent counterparts, who are later lured to more stable teaching environments (Goldhaber et al., 2007).

Research on teacher subset demographics reveals many trends. However, translation of the information into policy design is difficult because of the way the teaching force is scattered. All teachers have a specific set of individual needs, and all of those needs must be met in order to fully support the teacher in his/her work environment. Principals must be aware of the needs of all demographic subgroups of teachers and incorporate local factors as well.

## **Mentorship and Induction**

Mentorship is another factor that has been examined for its effects on teacher retention and attrition. It is generally accepted that proper and effective mentorship/induction is important for new teachers. National studies show clear positive correlations between teachers who are assigned mentors and retention rates (NCES, 2011). Yet, studies also indicate that many novice teachers report a lack of formal mentorship of any kind (Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Salyer, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

*Mentorship* is a term that is defined differently by various districts/workplaces. Research on mentorship and its connection to teacher retention has generally blended with studies on communities of practice or workplace support systems designed for new teachers. Ingersoll and Smith (2004), discussed the ideas of “Induction” and “Mentorship,” as being interdependent, especially in the first year of teaching. Their results indicated that proper induction and mentoring programs, such as collective planning sessions with mentors from the same subject field, had a positive effect on the job satisfaction and retention of novice teachers. The primary purpose of this research was to empirically measure the effectiveness of induction on new teacher retention and turnover, an endeavor which, they argue, has not been achieved in the contemporary body of research on mentorship.

Grossman and Thompson (2004), conducted a study on the role that district policy plays in its effect on new teacher induction, mentorship, and supervision, and their consequent effect on new teachers’ perceived efficacy when teaching a language arts curriculum. Results indicated that the organization of the district structures had dramatic

effects on the new teachers' perceived efficacy because of the ways that teaching assignments, resources, collegial support, and professional development were offered.

One problem with the analysis of mentorship and induction programs is that there is little consistency as to what systems, programs, or activities actually guarantee effective mentorship. Mentorship can differ in efficacy and duration, leading to differing retention outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentorship for a new teacher can range from simply having an assigned "veteran mentor" who can be used as a resource or sounding board, to an organized, collegial effort to support and supervise a new teacher over time. Induction programs can range from a bus tour of neighborhoods surrounding the school, to a comprehensive, systematic introduction to the profile of the student body and detailing of school support systems. Obviously, a strong and supportive induction/mentorship experience would raise the chances that a new teacher would achieve a level of success in his/her classroom and would remain in his/her teaching position, but the parameters and specification of what makes a mentorship program "strong and supportive" are open to interpretation. There is no guarantee that any adopted mentorship or induction program will be properly administered. Smethem (2007) reported that formal induction had a negative impact on some of the beginning teachers, stating that the induction had been too intense and fast to allow the teachers to absorb the information in a productive way.

Furthermore, there is no rule stating that effective mentorship must be in the form of a school-wide policy or district-level program. Personal, informal mentorship from one colleague, one family member, or one friend can be just as effective as any marketed program adopted by a district or school. Mentors themselves span a range of skill levels

when working with new teachers. Many studies which address “mentors” do not specify how the mentor/s was/were selected, and the personal characteristics of the mentor/s (Ingersoll, 2004).

Another problem with the research on teacher mentorship/induction stated by Ingersoll (2004) is that many of the studies were designed and implemented in order to study the efficacy of particular programs. In other words, many of the studies designed to collect these descriptive data are program evaluations. They were not designed to directly study the dynamic of mentorship in relation to other educational issues, such as attrition and retention. Furthermore, Ingersoll states that program evaluations often do not include comparison data from teachers who did not participate in the respective programs, and therefore the empirical legitimacy of the studies may be called to question. However, the program evaluations contribute some very compelling data to the overall discussion of the efficacy of induction and mentorship, and its effect on retention and attrition of novice teachers.

The complexities involved with the examination of mentorship/induction exemplify the panoramic scope of factors that could come into play when measuring its relation to retention and attrition. Therefore, a postmodern, holistic examination is appropriate considering the range of factors and influences that affect the experiences of new teachers in various schools and districts. What must be understood is how to organize a workplace in a way that supports, not stymies, a teacher’s efficacy/perceived efficacy. This is, of course, difficult to measure, align, and standardize.

Further complicating this body of knowledge on the relationship between retention rates and mentorship/induction for new teachers is that the programs themselves

are often under the direction of the principals. Proper implementation requires effective leadership. Administrations that support mentorship and induction programs and make an effort to properly facilitate such programs are often more likely to retain new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Lack of training and lack of a knowledge-base on the issues of new teacher induction can lead to variable effectiveness of principal support for new teachers (Youngs, 2007).

### **Perceived Efficacy/Workload**

A powerful intrinsic motivator ensconced in the research on new teacher retention/attrition is the concept of a perceived sense of “self-efficacy.” The term “Self-Efficacy” comes from the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1986) and posits that an individual’s ability to self-regulate effort towards a goal is based on levels of perceived confidence and achievement. Self-efficacy has emerged in the research on teacher attrition as having a major effect on teacher career decisions (Elliot, Isaacs, & Chugani, 2010). In fact, some research indicates that perceived self-efficacy is generally the leading indicator of retention in any given school scenario (Birkeland & Johnson, 2003). If a teacher can establish a sense of progress and efficacy with his/her students, than he/she is less likely to experience stress or leave the profession than one who cannot teach to his/her full potential because of workplace hindrances (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Birkeland and Johnson (2003), as a part of The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, completed a comprehensive study on the career decisions of 50 first or second-year teachers in Massachusetts. The study was designed to identify the factors that lead a

teacher's decision to stay in the field, leave the field, or transfer within the field. The results clearly indicated that the organization of the workplace was a determining factor for the participants. In all cases, the organization of the workplace either helped or hindered the teaching ability of the teachers, and affected their perceptions of their teaching efficacy.

This notion is supported by other research that documents intrinsic motivators as being important levers for career decisions in teaching. Shen (1997) documented that functional collaboration and empowerment within the school setting led to job satisfaction for teachers. Effective school organization and high teacher morale, although they are difficult to measure and define, are intrinsic motivators that drive the career decisions of an overwhelming majority of classroom teachers.

Lindsay Smethem, who conducted qualitative research on 18 teachers in England, collected the new teachers' conceptions of teaching, and of themselves as teachers, over a period of six years. The findings were that the teachers reported the moral purpose of teaching as the main contributor to job satisfaction. The report concluded that reformations and policies that stifled the teachers' ability to work towards this moral purpose not only contributed to job dissatisfaction, but also changed the teachers' conceptions of the career and of themselves as career teachers.

In addition to the notion that teachers need to perceive that they are effectively teaching their students, it is also important to note the connections between a lack of preparedness and a lack of perceived self-efficacy. Researchers who note that novice teachers are more likely to leave at higher rates than more experienced teachers, are supported by other researchers who make the connection between novice status and a



likelihood of struggle. Since new teachers are more likely to be placed in needy or underperforming schools, the variables that link with those workplaces will also contribute to a lack of perceived self-efficacy (Feng, 2005, Isaacs et al. 2007).

*Workload:* Novice teachers have different needs than veteran teachers, though they are often held to the same standards. Whether teachers have been teaching for a day or a decade, the accountability is the same, and the expectations are comparable. Novice teachers, when they are supported and guided through all aspects of the teaching profession, report higher satisfaction levels with their positions, and are more likely to stay in the position for the next year (Birkeland & Johnson, 2003; Grossman & Thompson, 2004).

Teachers also have more accountability in general than they have had in the history of public school teaching. The workload of teachers is, itself, under reform. In America, and in other industrialized nations, teaching is undergoing drastic centralist reform (Smethem, 2007). This dynamic is designed to increase teacher accountability, student performance, and overall school productivity, but it is also changing the profile of the teaching profession. Teachers now must write formal lesson plans, administer high-stakes tests, follow prescribed curriculum, and show data proving that their work has led to better-performing students. The consequences for not meeting these expectations can be serious. Teacher ‘burnout’ is a dynamic that is documented in literature (Gold, 1992; Johnson, 2004) and has been characterized by general feelings of emotional exhaustion, disbelief that effort will lead to success, and changed conceptions of themselves as career teachers.

While raising standards is always a goal within any work environment, the centralization of teachers' workloads has not only intensified it, but it has changed it to, in some cases, nothing more than following the script presented by policy-makers. Teachers must displace their instinctive goals for their students, and replace them with the automaton work of multiple, simultaneous, prescribed reform initiatives. Smethem wrote of this dynamic, "It is, perhaps, no surprise then that retention rather than recruitment of teachers has become a pressing concern in many countries." (Smethem, 2007, p. 466).

### **Working Conditions/Job Security**

Working conditions within the workplace have also been documented as having an effect on a teacher's perceptions of self-efficacy. Some studies have shown that average class size is higher for teachers who exited the teaching profession (Theobold, 1990), and that class sizes, in general, are higher in schools that serve a majority of Black or Black and Latino students (schools which typically tend to bear very high attrition statistics) (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) examined the working conditions of teachers in California in an attempt to separate working condition factors from student demographic variables as they articulate with attrition/retention rates in the respective districts. The authors conclude that working conditions such as quality of the facility, temperature, noise level, class size, adequacy of supplies, cleanliness of the bathrooms, etc. were positively correlated with attrition rates.

Job security is also a documented concern for new teachers, and it affects the perceived working conditions for teachers because it can be a source of stress and tension between administrators and teachers. Conversely, it can be an extrinsic motivator for teachers to remain in the profession. Inman and Marlow (2004) conducted a study which was to identify the perceived attitudes about varying aspects of the teaching profession in order to determine some factors that may lead to attrition/retention of beginning teachers. Within the group of 500 beginning teachers in Georgia, perceived job security was the highest-ranking motivational factor. Almost 60% of the entire group ranked this to be a positive factor (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Principals and school leaders are often left to mediate between budgetary issues and concerned teachers. Although many teachers are protected from budgetary layoffs, new teachers are not under such protections. Budgetary issues and lack of job security can be a source of anxiety and dissatisfaction for teachers, and this dynamic can be mediated by a skilled and trustworthy administrator. Clarity and honesty from principals is reportedly associated with teacher job satisfaction (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

### **Workplace Organization**

Schools are workplaces where teachers face a multitude of factors that collectively contribute job satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Demographic variables, self-efficacy, salary rates, collegial support, etc. all influence teacher satisfaction and retention (Johnson, 2006). No factor in isolation has any causal impact on attrition rates (Lehman & Stockard, 2004). Lehman and Stockard write,

1<sup>st</sup> year teachers' satisfaction is greatly influenced by the environments in which they work – the support they receive from others, the control they have over their

work environment, the mentoring they receive, the extent to which they are successful in the classroom, and the extent to which these environments are safe and orderly. These are characteristics that are greatly under the control of the building administrators and can be encouraged by school district-level policy. (Lehman & Stockard, 2004)

The work of Xiaofeng Steven Liu also supports the notion that new teachers' perceived level of influence over school policy positively correlated with retention. Drawing from statistical analysis from the National Center for Educational Statistics' Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000, and Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-2001, Lui reported that probabilities of first year teacher retention were significantly increased when the teachers perceived a sense of influence over the decision-making within their workplaces. Teacher empowerment is well documented in the literature as having a positive impact on retention outcomes (Liu, 2007; Shen, 1997).

Student misbehavior is a well-documented source of teacher stress and workplace dissatisfaction, (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Van Dick & Simpson, 1990) and teachers report that support with student misbehavior is an important component of a supportive school environment (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) concluded that the role of workplace influences on teacher turnover should be understood and utilized by school administrations. Kukla-Acevedo emphasizes that there are factors that school administrators can control, namely support with student misbehavior, allowing autonomy for teacher decision-making in the classroom, and making administrative support accessible. Kukla-Acevedo asserts that these known influences on teacher workplace satisfaction should be employed to create mechanisms for ensuring the retention of good teachers in schools (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

### **Principal Behavior/ Influence**

Generally, research has indicated that administrative support has a profound effect on the experiences of new teachers (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Research has documented many different types of leadership styles of principals, and exposed a range of principal behavior in schools. Because principals are responsible for creating school climate, retaining and supporting teachers, and coordinating new teacher mentorship (Wood, 2005), principals have a great deal of influence (both direct and indirect) over the issues that are of major concern for new teachers. Principals have control over the way new teacher concerns are approached, buffered, and filtered. Reported principal influence is a leading determinant in teachers' decisions to stay or leave a workplace (Jorisson, 2002), and research on principals' behavior ranges from highly supportive (Blase & Blase, 2004) to abusive (Blase & Blase, 2006). According to literature on teacher retention, teacher work conditions play more of a role in teacher attrition/retention statistics than previously noted in works in earlier decades, and many of the factors associated with teacher career decisions are factors that are amenable to change, such as collegial connections and administrative support (Borman & Dowling, 2007).

Researchers have examined leadership styles of principals, and consistent trends have arisen. Teachers appreciate autonomy coupled with easy access to structure and support from administrators, as opposed to laissez faire administrative styles (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Stafford, 2007).

Van Dick and Wagner (2001) reported that principal support reduced the perception of work overload and conflict for teachers involved in the study. Therefore,

not only do the authors imply that principals may have to the power to directly influence teacher workload and alleviate conflict, but even more suggestive is the notion that principals have the power to reduce the negative *perceptions* that the teachers may hold. In other words, even if the stressors are fixed variables which principals cannot change, the principals still have the power to affect how the stressors are received and perceived by the teachers. Teachers who reported low feelings of support were much more likely to show higher levels of stress and strain than teachers who reported high perceived levels of support. Weiss (1999) stated that “how new teachers experience workplace conditions is often as important as the workplace conditions themselves.” (p. 865). This idea is echoed in later studies as well (Hirshe, 2005; Smethem, 2007).

Smethem (2007) also explains that principals have the power of mediation between the initiatives that are mandated from above and the teachers who implement the initiatives. Principals are responsible for delivering information, assigning workload, improving instruction, and managing conflict. Skill in the delivery of these efforts has the potential to lower teacher stress level and encourage reflection and professional dialogue.

Weiss (1999) conducted a large-scale study with data extracted from the Schools and Staffing Surveys from 1987-88 and 1993-94. The study found that school leadership and culture, and teacher autonomy and discretion were the most influential factors affecting the new teachers’ exertion of best effort and commitment to teaching as a career. Results strongly indicated that principals’ support with student behavior, consistency of policy, clarity of expectations, and recognition of good work increased the teachers’ perceptions of high morale and positively influenced their overall conceptions of themselves as career teachers.

Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) for their study on workplace conditions for teachers, developed a “principal buffering index” (p. 255) to measure the degree to which teachers were protected from outside influences that may take away from their time planning for and implementing instruction in the classroom. In this index, outside interferences, in-school interruptions, and clerical work were all “buffered” by the principal in various systemic ways. Principal buffering, as a result, proved to be one of the two highest correlates to teacher commitment in the study of 1,213 teachers across 78 elementary schools in Tennessee.

In a recent study on the effects of principals’ behavior on school effectiveness, Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2009) provide evidence that personnel management plays an important role in highly effective schools. Using a value-added approach in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the researchers found that “Principals at schools which have shown prior growth in student achievement appear to be better able to attract and retain high quality teachers and remove low quality teachers.” (p. 18). Another important finding was that teachers who were considered “highly qualified” by the researchers’ value-added measurement system were more likely to stay in a school with an effective principal. Conversely, less qualified teachers were more likely to transfer to other schools or leave the profession (Beteille et al., 2009). This study has major implications for future research on the role of principals as they affect retention outcomes of highly effective teachers.

Principals who are responsive to the varying needs of teachers are principals who retain teachers. A report by Brown and Wynn (2007) investigated principal leadership styles in schools with low attrition rates. Results indicated that principals who were

successful at maintaining high rates of retention of their new teachers were principals who were accessible and who showed respect for the teachers. The principals were also proactive with their support, instead of reactive with their management. Brown and Wynn (2007) found that all of the effective principals in their study had established schools which followed (to varying degrees) a professional learning community model.

These principals also shared an awareness of the issues that affect new teachers. Moreover, they all (n=12) expressed the importance of careful hiring; that considering how new teachers will “fit” in the school environment is very important to the overall functioning of their respective schools (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

There are many systemic organizational changes/adaptations that can be made to support teachers in their roles as instructors. A small qualitative study by Peter Youngs (2007) revealed that school leaders’ actions reflected their personal backgrounds and knowledge base about the issues affecting new teachers. Informed principals play a crucial role in the implementation of initiatives that help the teachers feel a sense of support, recognition, and respect for the work they do in their classrooms. Principals can protect new teachers from outside influences, such as clerical tasks and non-instructional interruptions (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Even factors that are decided by parties outside the school setting still must trickle down through school leaders before they are presented to teachers. Principals and veteran teachers have a great deal of influence over how reform initiatives are presented, and how teachers are emotionally supported when they are affected by district, state, or national policy. School leaders have profound influence over the experiences and the empowerment of new teachers.



The responsive support that effective principals offer to teachers is difficult to define. One limitation of this body of research on principal influence is the inability to specify the behavior/s that lead to teachers' feelings of support from their administrations. Principals who are effective are responsive to the individual needs of teachers. Principals who are effective thrive at situational leadership, which is purely contextual. Some of the principals in the Brown and Wynn (2007) study echoed the need for contextual and varied support for the teachers in their respective schools. One stated, "My role is to do what I can to keep [new teachers] on board. Buddies, mentors, collaborators, good teammates, a shoulder or an ear, whatever it takes." (p. 680). Another effective principal stated that, "You have to be a factor that reduces that stress and not adds to it. Then your role becomes support, making sure that what you're doing is lowering the stress level they're feeling and raising their interest and excitement about the job." (p. 681).

If, in fact, school administrations and leadership styles are cited by teachers as one of the top sources of workplace dissatisfaction (Jorissen, 2002), and administrative style is a factor that is easier to change than other factors such as salary, prestige, and the conditions of the school building, then retention efforts that focus on administrative practices could significantly narrow the scope of this massive effort. If many of the factors that associate with teacher attrition and retention seem to funnel and filter through schools' administrations, and if the administrations have the power to affect how these factors are perceived by the teachers (Weiss, 1999), then this bottleneck could be the place to focus researchers' efforts.

Although principals are not ultimately responsible for the reduction of national retention rates, they are expected to fully support the development and working environment of all educators in their respective schools. With research documenting the importance of principal's behavior and control over workplace factors, it is evident that principals have the power to influence teacher retention in their schools. Veteran teachers, who have endured the pressures and reaped the benefits of successful development of master teaching skills, must also be aware of the research on the dissatisfaction of new teachers, and they must also take credit for the work that they do to novice teachers in their schools.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the research on this topic, a common theme has run through the majority of the literature; most teachers report that their decisions to leave or stay in a workplace are dependent on intrinsic motivations which can be either supported or hindered by the organizational structure of the workplace. Another theme that has emerged is the complexity of new teacher needs within a workplace. This interplay of the range of both intrinsic and extrinsic needs create a web of influence that cannot be teased apart by researchers in large-scale analysis.

Teachers make up a diverse group of people, numbering in the millions, with very diverse experiences in the workplace. Each teacher has his/her own framework of needs. National and global forces create a complex network of varying factors that affect the experiences of new teachers. Some teachers deal well with the complexity of the factors, others do not. Some teachers are worth the effort of retaining, others are not.

The complexities of the causes of new teacher attrition and the indefinable nature of workplace “satisfaction” support the argument that the problem with teacher retention cannot be solved easily or with a policy which cites only one part of the problem, such as increased salaries, mentorship, or smaller class sizes.

Newer research has aimed to expose the complexities or the intangible factors behind new teacher satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Studies which demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the issue of teacher retention make a significant contribution to the argument that the factors leading to attrition and job dissatisfaction of teachers should be examined at the local level to ensure accurate policy for the given population. Local responsiveness to new teacher concerns on an individual basis is a strategy that would point this research in a new direction, and would fall, ultimately, in the hands of skilled administrators.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine 6 principals' perceptions of the main factors behind teacher retention statistics and their personal perceptions of their role as a factor in the career decisions of new teachers. A phenomenological method was used to structure this proposed investigation (Creswell, 1998; Husserl, 1931). The phenomenon that was examined was the way that the principals' perceptions related to or influenced their actions as they worked to retain good teachers in their schools. In-depth interviewing investigated the principals' own experiences as a new teacher, their perceptions of teacher retention statistics on a national and local level, and their perceived level of influence over the retention rate of new teachers in their respective schools. Principals were asked to specifically describe the ways in which they put those perceptions into action. This chapter will detail the steps involved with the administration of this study.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

##### **The Metaphor**

In a mosaic, the more tiles that are added, the farther one must back away in order to see them all, making the image smoother and smoother in appearance. By design, they begin to blend and conform, and the details of the individual tiles become increasingly lost in the overall image. As the viewer backs away, the overall mosaic composition is defined and clarified, and the tiles lose their individuality in order to support the larger

composition. Furthermore, in a mosaic, certain colors or textures will dominate the design, while other tiles remain understated or unnoticed.

The same effect occurs in research. Any attempt to enlarge the research sample in order to include more participants will only blur the individuality of each participant. Furthermore, any attempt to zoom-in and limit the participant pool in order to observe the individuality of particular participants will require the exclusion of the other cases and render the research as merely “anecdotal,” or too individualized to produce generalizable results.

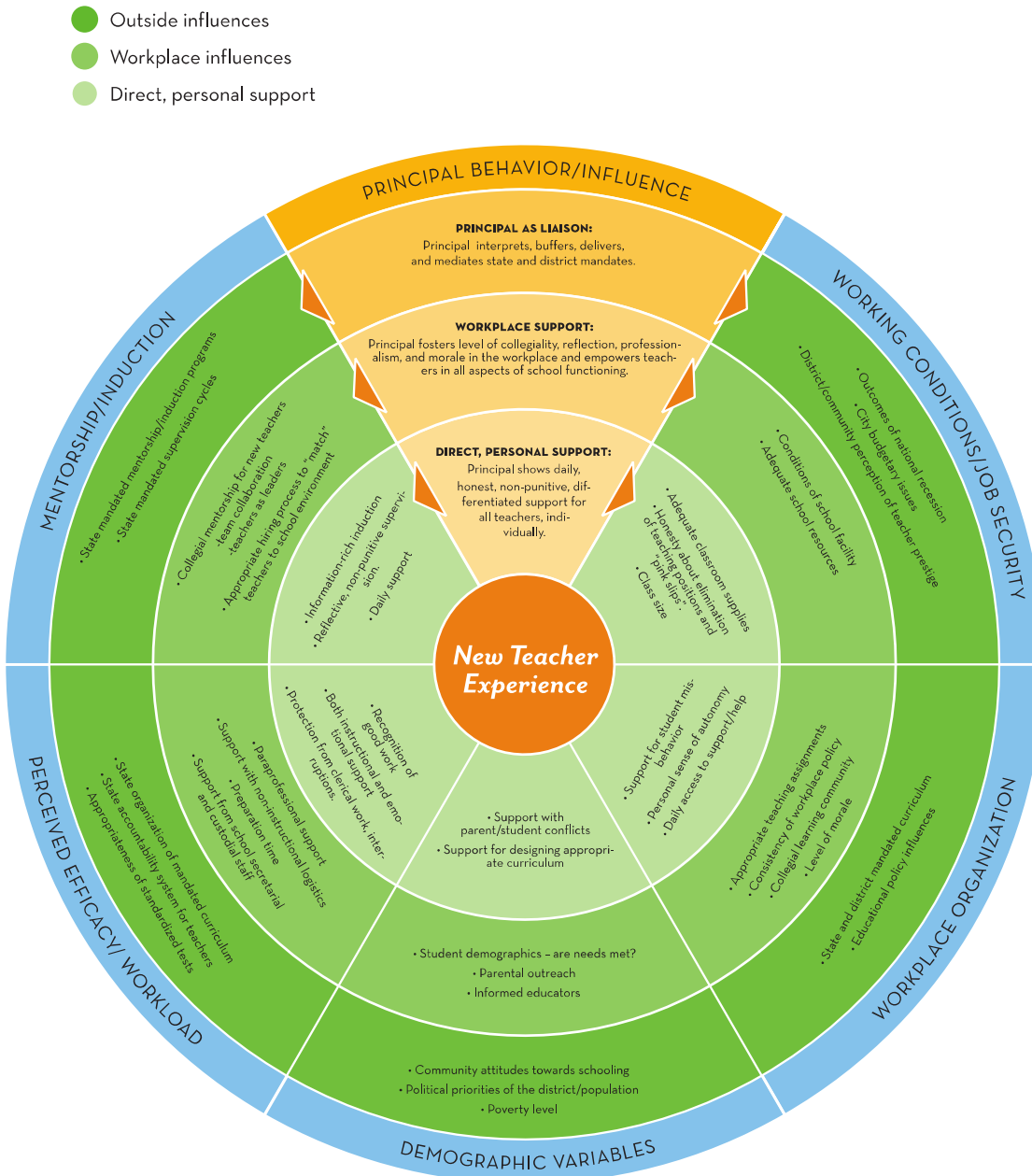
### **The Theory**

Postmodernist critical theorists argue that even the most rigorous research design will not be able to accurately represent every case that exists in the panorama of influences that together make up a complex sociological phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). This research followed a postmodern, critical stance by asking questions and examining the answers against the backdrop of the overarching body of multivariate research on this topic. Therefore, it was an attempt to pool together the existing body of research, but to also take care to listen to the individual cases that fell into this phenomenon. It was an attempt to connect the macro body of research to the micro case study, so that researchers may be able to use the data to create comprehensive tools to put to use in the future.

The following research framework, entitled *Principal Influence over New Teacher Experience in a Workplace*, has been constructed as a way of demonstrating how a principal can influence the way a new teacher experiences the multitude of variables that

contribute to teacher job satisfaction. The Principal Influence Model (PIM) in Figure 1 was used to structure part of the interview protocol for this proposed study.

Figure 1. Principal Influence over New Teacher Experience in a Workplace



### **Research Questions**

The in-depth interviews were designed to examine the various constructs shown in the PIM, and investigate the interaction between the body of literature on teacher retention and attrition, and the actions of the school leader. The research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent do the principals identify with the new teacher experience?
2. What do principals perceive to be the main factors behind high attrition rates for new teachers, and to what extent do principals believe that new teacher retention is important?
3. In what ways do the principals support new teachers in schools, and how is this effort affected by their perceptions of the research on new teacher retention or contextual variables?

### **Setting and Participants**

Thirty-eight elementary school principals from three counties in a Northeastern state were identified using a purposive sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998). Principals from schools employing between 19 and 30 Full-Time Equivalency (FTE) teachers in the first two counties, and between 12 and 30 FTE teachers in the third county, respectively, were invited to participate. The official public education state website was used to systematically identify schools with a specific teacher-count. Principals in schools employing fewer than, or more than, the allotted range for each county were not contacted for this proposed study, even if they were in the same district as other potential participating principals. This selectivity ensured that the principals who participated were

working to support a relatively consistent number of teachers in their respective schools. This selectivity also ensured that none of the participating schools employed a “vice” or “assistant” principal who may also have been responsible for supporting the teachers. The reason that the third county was allowed a wider FTE teacher count (12-30 versus 19-30) was because it was considered a rural district, and the elementary schools tended to be smaller. All other aforementioned eligibility requirements were followed.

Although most urban schools did not fit the teacher-count criteria, it should be noted that principals in urban areas were excluded from this study, as urban schools tend to bear their own specific variables and retention rate statistics. No charter schools or independent schools were invited into this investigation. One eligible public school was not invited to participate because the current principal was the researcher’s former principal from 2001-2003.

### **Gaining Entry and Informed Consent**

Thirty-eight elementary school principals in three counties of a Northeastern state were emailed a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the parameters of the in-depth interview, including duration and scheduling strategies (Appendix A). The letter was both emailed and sent through the postal service, in some cases. Principals willing to participate were asked to contact the researcher for further information, including the scheduling of a pre-interview site visit, upon request. Initial contact with the principals was made by telephone and/or email.

Any interested party was considered to enter the study, regardless of number of years of experience, experience in other districts in previous years, age, gender,



race/ethnicity, or other demographic variables. It was assumed that the participating principal would be the primary supporter of new teachers in these schools, given the relatively low number of fulltime employees. Therefore, although vice principals may provide a wealth of support for teachers in some scenarios, they were not invited to participate in this study.

Initial invitations in two counties yielded six willing participants. One participant dropped out of the study after the first interview, and another was deemed an inappropriate participant because he did not fit the selection criteria due to the fact that he did not act as the primary supporter of the elementary school teachers. A follow-up invitation was sent to the non-responders, but did not yield any willing participants. A set of invitations was then issued to principals in the third county, which yielded two additional willing participants, for a total of 6 willing participants.

Table 1 represents a basic outline of known demographic information about the participants at the time of the interviews. Pseudonyms were used in the chart and throughout this report to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Years in Current School</b>	<b>Years as a Principal</b>	<b>Previous Career</b>
<b>Sandy</b>	F	Suburban	12	24	None
<b>Jenn</b>	F	Suburban	8	8	None
<b>Anne</b>	F	Suburban	7	7	None
<b>Laura</b>	F	Suburban	1.5	1.5	Paralegal
<b>Richard</b>	M	Rural	7	9	None
<b>Marc</b>	M	Rural	2	6	International Salesman

### **Phenomenological Design**

Three separate, 60 to 90-minute interviews were conducted with each participant over a 3-12 week period, respectively. Internal Review Board approval was obtained, and letters of informed consent were signed at the first interview (Appendix B). The interviews were structured to investigate how principals' previous experience and current perceptions of their role in teacher retention have shaped their actions as they support new teachers in a school setting. The interviews were structured in the following three stages (Seidman, 2006):

The first stage of the interviews investigated the context in which the principals perceived the new teacher experience. The questions were designed to examine how the principals identified with a new teacher's experience, what they experienced as new teachers, and any experience with their school leaders or former employers that have shaped their leadership style or philosophy at present.

The second stage of the interview investigated what principals knew about current retention/attrition statistics (both local and national), what they remembered learning about those statistics in their respective training programs, and how their previous experiences and current knowledge interacted as they constructed meaning of current retention/attrition cycles on national and local levels. They were also asked to articulate how they knew a teacher was worth retaining, and what they did if they perceived a teacher to be weak or not worth retaining.

The third stage of the interview investigated how the principals perceived the local retention/attrition rates, and what they did in their schools to influence the career

decisions of new teachers. Principals were asked to specifically articulate what they said and what they did in their efforts to support and retain teachers.

### **Pilot Study 1**

A pilot study was conducted in the spring of 2011. The study tested the questions on one male elementary school principal, who benefitted from a very low attrition rate of teachers in his school. The purpose of the phenomenological pilot study was to (a) examine one principal's beliefs about teacher retention/attrition statistics on a national and local level; (b) to examine his perceived level of control over the retention of teachers in his school; and (c) to describe how that perceived control affected the actions he took to support new teachers. The researcher conducted a one-hour interview, which was fully recorded and transcribed. Artifacts collected included town demographic information, a mentoring handbook that was distributed to new teachers and their mentors, and a Likert scale item which asked the participant to rate his perceived level of control over the retention of new teachers. Data were coded for thematic findings using a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results revealed that the participant held the following beliefs:

- The participant had a great deal of perceived influence over new teacher retention.
- Appropriate “matching” of a new teacher to a job site was a crucial component in retention efforts.
- Principals must be able to make hiring decisions.

- It was better to invest in hiring teachers who had already had successful teaching experiences.
- A principal's ability to reshuffle job positions could prevent the need to eliminate staff members in times of economic recession or low student enrollment.
- Mentorship should be holistic.

Results also indicated that the principal's perceptions of national retention/attrition rates were skewed by local interpretations. It should be noted that this principal had experienced a zero percent attrition rate in his 16-year span as a principal at this site. The context of this school's respective community and low attrition rate seemed to shape his overall perception of retention in a number of ways. Most notably, he mentioned two constructs within the PIM on teacher retention/attrition: Mentorship and Principal Influence, and did not cite other constructs that were prominent in the literature on teacher attrition, such as workplace organization, salary scale, workload, or demographic variables. These results made contextual sense, and helped to shape the interview protocol for this study (Appendix C).

The first pilot study informed the steps of this study in various ways. First, the interview time was expanded for each participant. Three 60- to 90-minute interviews were conducted with each participant. This added to the overall breadth of the study, and it supported the validity of the contextual results. Second, the Likert item was removed from the analysis, because its style was deemed to be too limiting for this type of open analysis. Third, a plethora of new questions were added to the interview protocol to examine the principals' perceptions of constructs in the PIM, regardless of whether or not

they were perceived by the interviewer or the interviewee to be contextually significant. As a result, all participants were asked to reflect on all of the emergent constructs that appear in the PIM. Fourth, research criteria were shifted to include some slightly larger schools. This shift was done to increase the likelihood that the principals have had recent experience with the hiring and retaining of new teachers, but to keep the teacher/principal ratio low to ensure that the principal (and not the vice principal) was most likely to be responsible for the support system for the new teachers.

### **Pilot Study 2**

A second pilot study was conducted in the spring of 2012, which involved an expanded version of the original interview protocol to investigate the efficacy of the 3-part interview method. In the second pilot, a new participant was selected. The participant was a former male principal from a district which matched the selection criteria for participation in this study: (employing between 12 and 30 fulltime teachers.) The primary purpose of the 3-part interview was to examine the following questions:

1. To what extent do the principals identify with the new teacher experience?
2. To what extent do principals believe that new teacher retention and the factors that influence a new teacher's experience are important?
3. What actions do they take to support new teachers?

The interview was fully recorded. Artifacts were not collected. The principal had been retired for 14 years.

Results from the second pilot interview were as follows:

1. The principal perceived that careful hiring was crucial.

2. The understanding/perception of teacher retention issues was contextual.
3. The participant was motivated to become a principal because of the pay increase.
4. Leadership from the veteran teachers helped him develop a strong school and a strong rapport with the teachers.
5. The leadership qualities that the participant employed were instinctive, not taught.

Overall, the participant, during his time as a principal, was able to benefit from a low level of attrition due to job dissatisfaction. The participant reported that the transient nature of the workforce due to the proximity to a major university was the main cause of teacher mobility.

The second pilot study informed the current methodology in the following ways:

1. The interview protocol was changed to include clarifying statements to certain questions if the participant needed a further prompt.
2. The implementation of the pilot interview aided in the development of a series of advance-organizational statements that was provided for participants before the beginning of each interview. Those statements were added to the interview protocol.
3. The questions were edited to directly address more of the actions that principals take in schools to support new teachers.
4. The questions were reordered to match a more consecutive life-event sequence.

### **Researcher Perspective**

The researcher is a 36-year-old doctoral candidate at a large public university in the Northeastern United States, and is now a director of an undergraduate education licensure program at a small, private, women's college. She was an assistant professor of education for six years. She holds a professional public teaching license, and was a teacher in a sixth-grade, self-contained classroom for three years in a small town. Her training is in the areas of pre-service teacher education and school reform. Her research has focused on the phenomenon of the new teacher experience, and this is the angle from which she entered this investigation.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Each participant was interviewed in three, separate 60 to 90-minute sessions. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Both Phenomenological design and Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to design the methodological structure of this study, including the employment of a constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding was used to initially deduce categories, with the research questions as the starting-point for the categorical organization. From this etic perspective, a data collection matrix, organized by emergent themes and constructs from the PIM, was used to gather and display ideas (Appendix D).

### **Trustworthiness**

Several strategies will be used to ensure the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis. First, notes were developed during and after the interviews, when needed, as a

record of initial thoughts. Those notes were kept on the interview protocol paperwork. A detailed audit trail, including full transcriptions, coding notes, data collection matrices, and researcher notes were kept current throughout the project.

Three separate, 60 to 90-minute interviews provided a holistic picture of the experiences of the participant. While shorter interviewing strategies may have been influenced by arbitrary factors such as mood, illness, fatigue, etc., the in-depth process gathered information over a longer period of time. Furthermore, the in-depth interviewing allowed the researcher to identify inconsistencies and follow up on any discrepancies. The three-stage process allowed for data from one interview to give credibility and validity to another. This prolonged engagement with the participant aided in the trustworthiness of the data and the subsequent analysis.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, 2 pilot studies were conducted to ensure the efficacy, flow, and clarity of the research protocol.

### **Limitations**

Small sample size was a major limitation of this study. This study should be viewed as a supportive analysis of the concepts displayed in the PIM. No urban schools were invited to participate in this study, which excluded an important set of voices from this investigation.

Another major limitation of this study was that the reported experiences and perceptions of the principals can only be theorized to have an influence on the retention rates at their respective schools. Teachers were not questioned to determine whether or



not the principals' behaviors influenced the teachers in the way in which the principals intended.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

As a result of this study, it was evident that the participating principals believed that new teacher retention was a crucial component of school functioning, and they perceived themselves to have a great deal of influence over new teacher job satisfaction and eventual retention. More specifically, it was evident that the participants do intentionally try to retain good teachers. It was also apparent that the principals did interact with many of the constructs that appear in the PIM, and their perceptions and actions were consistent with the multidimensional behaviors featured in that model.

Results from this study will be reported in three broad categories and sorted into 8 themes. Some of the categorical and thematic analysis is derived from and aligned with categories found in the literature and recorded in the PIM. Other new themes were developed as a result of this study. The following three categories will be examined:

1. Principal identification with the new teacher experience
2. Perceptions of the importance and of the main factors behind new teacher retention statistics
3. How the principals translate their perceptions into actions that support new teachers.

#### **Identification with the New Teacher Experience**

All of the principals who participated in this study had and described vivid memories of their experiences as a new teacher. They also all had varying levels of positive and negative experiences with their principal/school leader at the time.

Therefore, results from this category were organized into those two themes:

Identification with the work environment of the new teacher, and leadership skills that they try to emulate now.

### **Identification with the Work of a New Teacher**

Most of the principals demonstrated that they empathized with the multivariate working conditions, challenges, and rewards of teaching by reflecting on their own experiences. They also expressed an empathy for the current complexities of the new teacher experience. By sharing both their personal memories of being a new teacher as well as their personal interactions with new teachers in their schools now, the principals were able to clearly demonstrate that they could identify and empathize with the multivariate work environment of the new teacher.

Sandy describes her first teaching experience as an ideal scenario. She began with 14 elementary school students in a small school in a rural district. Because the school was small, the principal was rarely there. She reports appreciating the flexibility, but also articulated the challenges of being “on your own.” She stated that, “...you learn to do everything. There was no union, so the kids were ours from five of nine until three [o’clock]. Lunch, recess, everything. What we figured out as a group of four teachers, basically, was who could cover who at recess so you could get to the bathroom. But we all knew how to fix the boiler if it went off, we all knew how to unclog toilets. ...It was just us, doing what was best for the kids.” When asked about her specific experiences with the principal that she had at that school, she reported that she “...learned a lot from him in terms of how to work with people ...figure out what people are good at, and let

them do it. Just get out of their way. He was incredibly respectful. The first time he observed me he literally ripped a little corner off of a [paper] and [wrote], 'I'm so impressed with the rapport you have with the kids.' I still have that tiny little piece of paper."

Jenn, in her first years as a teacher was thrust into a classroom of behaviorally challenged adolescents with little support, and moved to another school with no administrative support. She states, "...as a new teacher ...you were usually given the lowest track...you were supposed to go in, not complain, and do your job. I literally had an empty classroom. There wasn't a book. There wasn't a pencil. ... The veterans [teachers] didn't want to be bothered. 'I've got my job. You're hired. Do your job.'" She continued, "The experience was, if you are the lowest on the totem pole, you got the lowest students too. You got assigned to lunch duty, bus duty...More work. More work than anybody else because you had to earn your stripes." She described an incident where a student set off a powerful firecracker at her feet in the classroom, and the principal thought she was overreacting when she sent the student to the office and asked for behavioral support. Similarly, in another teaching position, she stated that there was no administrative support. She stated that "It just wasn't the culture at that time."

Anne, described her first formal teaching experience as a powerful learning experience, but as a very difficult placement with 40 sixth-graders in a Catholic School. She described how she would go "home crying almost every night because it was so hard, and I just didn't know what I was doing, and I'd spend hours at night just doing my lesson plans..." Anne described how she once called her school leader in the middle of the year and said "...I just can't go back there. I can't go back again. I don't know how to

manage these kids. They are disrespectful and this and this and this, and she said: 'I'm too busy to talk about this right now,' and hung up."

Despite the challenges of the first year, Anne also reports that she appreciated the way the challenges were layered, one after another, as she began to grasp the multidimensional art of teaching. She reports appreciating the flexibility that was coupled with the lack of support, stating that the school leaders and fellow teachers "...were very accepting of everything that I did." She reports taking on the teaching of mature material during the Vietnam War era, and she reports that "Nobody ever came and said 'You shouldn't be doing that.'"

Marc, reports having an ideal first teaching experience at a residential special needs school where he worked closely with the head of the school to solve student issues. He reports that this experience was a "...very small family environment [where] you get a lot of on-the-spot training, mentoring. You're talking about things all the time and, again, you're immersed in it..." When asked about his experiences with the head of the school, Marc described the leader as someone who "...took care of his people and took care of the kids. He always had that feeling of 'What is it that we need to do to help the kids?' ...his skill set was all about taking care of people." When faced with another job offer, Marc chose to stay at that school because of the professional support that he was given on a daily basis.

Only one participant, Laura, who is only in her second year as a principal, did not report her first teaching experience as reflecting the typical trends that are commonly highlighted in the literature. She reports herself as coming into the profession with more professional maturity than a teacher who is in the typical post-undergraduate age group.

She attributes this level of maturity to her change of career, as she began her career spending 10 years in a law office. She explained that her experiences in the organizational structure of a high-pressure environment leant itself easily into a school environment, where structure and efficiency are crucial. She also did not report any noteworthy memories of her first principal or school leader, neither positive nor negative. She stated, “That principal... didn’t see much of him. He would pass out paychecks on Fridays. He was good at fixing things...he basically left people alone.”

When asked how she transitioned into the administrator role, Laura did share a later experience with a principal, stating that, “...we had a principal who was horrible, and she had a lot of problems. She seemed to have a temper. She was kind-of up and down with her personality, and she would get angry. We would have a meeting and she would get angry at everybody.” Interestingly, this experience was reported to the interviewer as a reason for Laura’s shift to administration. ““Can’t we do better than this?”” was a question that guided her into applying for the position after the aforementioned principal was fired.

While other participants noted instances that indicated a high level of passion for those first experiences coupled with the blind idealism of the novice experience, Laura maintained that her early experiences were more driven by the urge to organize her many tasks into a manageable system of operation.

Richard began his career teaching at an alternative kindergarten through grade 8 school. It was considered a “free school,” and it was at this school that he completed his student teaching and received his first teaching position. He described his first year as a “disaster,” yet he described loving the flexibility of being able to experiment with

alternative curriculum. He specifically remembers a letter from a student that affected his perceptions of his work as an educator. "...10 years after [the student] left, I get this letter in the mail from this guy, Jack. Jack sent me a letter basically saying how his father had died when he was two or three and I was the largest male influence in his life as he was growing up...but I didn't know. [I] was just some young guy doing his stuff and having some fun, so that letter taught me a lot about the impact...I still have connections with those kids." He refers to the idealism of novice teaching as a "strong force" that he understands and tries to channel properly in his new teachers.

Richard was also quick to connect the memories to his current experiences as a principal. He stated, "I had a hard time with the older kids especially, and actually it helped me because I have a second year teacher here who is having a hard time with some of the sixth graders, and there are boundaries, and young folks tend to blur those boundaries..."

In another reference to his first year "disaster," Richard shared that he says to his first year teachers: "...you are going to look in the mirror some mornings and say 'yes. I am the gift', and then there's the mornings when you wake up...and you look in that same mirror and you go: 'What ever made me think I could do this?'"

He described an instance in his first year of teaching in public school when his class didn't have a "special" subject scheduled on that particular day. He remembers wondering when he would get to go to the bathroom. He stated, "I mean, it sounds silly, but it's very real. It's very real, and being able to empathize with the teacher and saying, 'Yup, we will figure out how to help you.'"

With the exception of Laura, all participants described incidents which indicate an empathetic understanding of the novice teacher experience. They all articulated an understanding, through personal memories and interactions with new teachers, of the challenges, rewards, and complexities of the work of a new teacher.

### **Emulated Leadership Skills**

Following the discussion of their first experiences as a new teacher in the field of education, all participants were asked to describe what leader from their previous experiences they now try to emulate as they interact with teachers in their respective schools. Interestingly, four out of the six participants chose to describe a mentor who had particularly good listening skills. The leaders mentioned by these participants all possessed varying characteristics of high expectations, listening skills, and careful problem solving.

Richard stated that he thinks about his previous employer from time to time because he "...was really wise, and it showed me that you can ...take some time to think about things and come up with the best answer. It's the impulsive answers that tend to get me and others in trouble. He was just a really wise human being, and he taught me a lot about administration." Marc informed me that he had asked his previous employer how he handled so many people and tasks, and the answer was: "...you've got to listen. You've got to learn how to be a good listener." Sandy also reported her previous mentor as being a good listener, and another as having high expectations for new principals, believing that they needed to "...own the job," and not rely on others to clean up your mistakes. Jenn stated that she had many influential leaders in her career, and that they all



had good listening skills, productive suggestions, and were free with their praise and support.

Anne, because she was appointed to her first principal position unexpectedly in the middle of an academic year, cited her most influential professional leader as being her fellow principals who helped her define her role as a new principal and guided her investigation of what teachers need from an effective principal. Anne cited one particular colleague as asking great questions, and generating a true sense of collaboration which benefitted her in her new role.

Laura was the only person who chose a fellow teacher to mention as her influential leader, and cited her creativity and innovative teaching style as the main reasons. She also mentioned some lawyers who had had a positive influence on her sense of organization and structural functioning, but she did not elaborate on their specific leadership strategies.

With the exception Laura, all other participants cited interpersonal skills and communication skills as being the qualities of their most influential leaders. These five participants all cited these skills as being a crucial foundation of their current work as a school leader.

### **Perception of the Main Factors of New Teacher Retention/Attrition**

Open coding of the interview transcripts revealed that principals perceive many different factors as having influence over new teacher retention. The phenomenon mentioned by the principals were bundled and developed into the following three themes:

The principals' effort to retain teachers is intentional, proper support is what makes teachers stay in the field, and "good" teaching has many definitions.

### **Principals' Effort to Retain Teachers is Intentional**

This small sample of principals demonstrated in many ways that they intentionally try to retain good teachers in their schools. They believed that teacher retention is important to school functioning, they believe that they have influence over the retention of new teachers, and they believe that the hiring process is a crucial component of the retention process and the eventual job satisfaction of the new teacher. Therefore, this theme is organized into those sections: retention as crucial to school functioning, principals' belief that they have influence over new teacher retention, and the hiring process as crucial to retention efforts.

### **Retention as Crucial to School Functioning**

Results indicated that all of the principals in this study believed that new teacher retention was important to school functioning. Retention was reported to be a prerequisite of positive school culture, and positive school culture was a prerequisite of the school being a positive community hub. All participants used the word "culture" when they addressed their perceptions of the degree to which retention affects school functioning. Participants were articulate in their descriptions of the cyclic nature attrition and retention trends, and were in agreement on the fact that schools are unusually dependent on retention for secure functioning, unlike other systematic industry, which can afford some level of attrition.

Richard said [of new teacher retention], “It’s the future.” He stated that attrition erodes school culture “because the institutional memory is getting erased all the time.”

Marc articulated that schools are “...not a hospital, they are not a town hall. They are not a major business...They are not like the mountain project or the paper mill. The school is a focus of the community, and it is a true community location.” He went on to explain, “I’m not saying that they have to be there for 30 years, but I’m saying that having been there for a few years can really add to the culture, the climate, and create and build it, and that will help. And, it doesn’t just help the educators in the building, it helps the community.”

Jenn also tried to articulate the difference between school attrition and attrition in other sectors of industry. She explained, “My father was the manager of an engineering lab that developed diesel fuel injection pumps. If you had turnover of engineers, it might lengthen the development of the pump, but the pump is not a human being. The pump’s not going to be damaged if it has to wait six months for the right engineer to come on board. But, when you are talking about children, they are [just] sitting here.”

The principals all also mentioned the inefficiency of the training when there is turnover. Varying degrees of costs were mentioned, such as professional development, the cost of the advertisements, and the general waste of time and effort. Therefore, all of the principals cited attrition as having a negative impact on a range of school functions, from wasted use of school resources, to the weakening of the school culture and, ultimately, the weakening of community success.

### **Principals' Belief that They Have Influence over New Teacher Retention**

This study revealed that 5 out of the 6 principals who participated perceived themselves to have a high degree of personal influence over the retention of new teachers in their schools.

Furthermore, many of the principals demonstrated modesty when asked to what degree they perceived themselves to influence the retention at their schools. At first, most were unwilling to give themselves direct credit for the high retention rates in their own schools in the interviews, and they were more likely to credit an indirect system, such as a mentorship program, for the high retention rates.

Richard reported that he believed himself to have a great deal of influence over new teacher retention, but was quick to credit the mentorship program that has provided a systemic support structure. Richard went on to say,

“I’ve seen people who are really good at pushing paper, but you have to lead. And that doesn’t mean that you take credit for everything, it means that you give credit for everything. I like to say, ‘When things are going well, you don’t even know I’m around. And when the shit hits the fan, I’m the only one you see.’ Because that, I think, is my job.”

Marc was clear throughout the duration of the interviews that he believed the leadership to be the most crucial factor in the retention rates of employees. When asked how much he influences new teacher retention in his school, except for decisions made by pregnancies or retirements, his answer was, “I influence everything else.” He goes on to elaborate and introduce a new analogy for the multiple layers of support:

I see the principal as the filter system, and I look at the principal as being able to filter and allow in, at the right time, the critical things that are going to help to develop their people. So you’ve got your staff and your people there in the water and you are there as the filter and everything’s coming in. ...and I think this is the problem that the principals don’t have

a sufficient strong enough grasp of what they should allow in and out, and this too much water coming in and ... people are drowning.

Anne clearly perceived her roll to be the key to teacher retention and school functioning. She stated, “I think that the teacher’s happiness in a classroom and feeling of professional satisfaction is really dependent on the principal, but I didn’t know that when I was a teacher, which means something, I guess.”

Clearly, whether they demonstrated modesty or not, these principals understood their role to be a multi-dimensional task which would influence how the teachers’ experience the school environment. Laura was the only participant who reported that she didn’t know if she has a great deal of influence. The others all perceived that it was their responsibility to ensure that the new teachers were supported and professionally fulfilled.

### **The Hiring Process is Crucial to Retention Efforts**

For all of the participants, the hiring process was the multi-layered beginning of ensuring the retention of the new teacher and, to a larger degree, ensuring the proper continuation of effective school functioning. Both Jenn and Anne reported that that the hiring process is one of the most crucial aspects of their jobs as the school leader, and that it certainly affects the eventual retention of the new teacher. Both Jenn and Marc went on to elaborate that it also affects the retention of other teachers in the building, because the climate can be impacted by a new person. Marc referred to an analogy of a cooking recipe; that the ingredients have to be balanced.

When asked if he believed if the hiring process lead to the eventual retention of a new teacher, Richard did not answer in the affirmative, but instead remarked: “I don’t know if I can draw a straight line from the [hiring] process to their retention, because that

180 days of school is so dramatic. It's a marathon. . . .I mean, the hiring process is so far removed from that.” However, Richard demonstrated how important the process of hiring is when he explained that he always needs to have a second interview before a decision is made. He also explained that he looks for certain attributes that would be considered intangible. “I can't teach them how to like kids, and I can't teach them how to think on their feet.” He also went on to elaborate that, “It is my job to help them succeed. It is my job to put the people in a place where they have the best chance of succeeding.” He added, “It is my job to manage the talent.” Therefore, although he was hesitant to draw a direct connection between the hiring process and the eventual retention of the new teacher, there was evidence that his practices matched the other participants' practices in their theory about how important hiring decisions are for the overall functioning of the school.

Laura, when asked if the hiring process lead to teacher retention, she answered, “I hope so.” Laura was only in her second year as a principal, so she believed that she could not answer that question directly because she did not have any longitudinal data on whether or not the teachers in her school would stay. She elaborated on her hiring practices by stating her guiding questions, ““Do you like the person? What's their personality like? Is this person going to be able to fit with the other people in that grade level and team?” ... I'm very intuitive, and sometimes I say, ‘I don't think this person's going to work.’, even though they have all of the credentials.” She did mention, however, that she also used advanced search functions on online employment databases to keyword for particular curriculum skills, so that she doesn't have to train a new person to use their current curriculum package.

Laura also explained that there is transparency in her hiring process because she enlists the help of the grade level teachers, and all of the candidates' application materials are made available to the team.

When Sandy hires a new teacher she states that she is looking for someone who "...is independent, who isn't going to need a lot of handholding. ...I'm looking at the big picture. 'Are you going to fit into the culture of the school?'" This reference to "handholding" and the "big picture" echoes the terminology used by Richard when he described that he was looking to hire someone who could "think on their feet." The implication is that the principals would not be able to help the new teachers with every decision that had to be made, so the candidates needed to demonstrate independence and competence in making daily decisions that affect the well-being of children and families.

As a group, the participants believed that the decisions that they made when they were hiring a new teacher was a crucial step in the building of a positive school culture, and that the hiring decision was a best guess at the probable retention of the new teacher. The metaphorical language used by the participants to describe their hiring decisions articulates the multitude of factors being considered simultaneously as they determine the probable success of a candidate amidst the multivariate work of a new teacher.

### **Proper Support Is What Makes Teachers Stay in the Field**

All of the participants were asked what they perceived to be the main reason/s that new teachers decided to stay in the teaching profession. Results indicated that all principals cited proper support as being the factor that had profound influence. Some participants discussed the personal support to each individual teacher, and others

highlighted the systemic support that is inherent in a culture of positive collaboration.

The principals also articulated that new teachers needed a great deal of support compared to veteran teachers, and they perceived that their administration certification programs did not adequately prepare them to deal with retention/attrition issues and to help new teachers be successful. Therefore, this theme is organized into those 3 sections: Proper support leads to retention; new teachers need a great deal of support; and principals' perceived lack of administrative training on retention issues.

### **Proper Support Leads to Retention**

Results indicated that all principals cited proper support as being the factor that had profound influence over retention of new teachers. Jenn, who had previously listed dozens of factors that make a new teacher's day complex, stated that having support for those very things was what she believes to be the key to retention. However, she stated that that support does not always have to come from her. She states "I know that my veteran teachers are, without me saying anything, checking in on new teachers ... in a supportive way..."

Richard stated that, with proper support, the job is "...only just mildly bone-crushingly difficult." Anne mentioned that "professional satisfaction" is what leads to retention. However, in describing the components of professional satisfaction, it was clear that professional satisfaction is achieved when a proper support system is in place. Therefore, the researcher concludes that, in this case, professional satisfaction and its outcome, retention, are both the effects of proper support from this participant.



Marc also mentioned “good pedigree” as being a factor in new teacher resilience, but also mentioned that strength of character can also be more likely to clash with leadership efforts. Marc went on to explain that differentiated and nuanced leadership is necessary in order to provide support for all individual teachers. “...that’s a critical part to it, of being able to identify educators who really do need support who might not be asking. A good leader will know their people...they can cope if they are given the support for it. So, leadership is critical.”

Sandy stated that teachers need to feel supported, and they need to know that “...their back’s going to be covered by their administrator.” She mentioned, as did other participants, that new teachers need to be able to ask for support without fear of punishment, and that the sense of safety is a crucial component of a supportive environment.

Despite the different strategies and philosophies, all principals agreed that “support” is the main factor in a new teacher’s decision to leave or stay in a teaching position.

### **New Teachers Need a Great Deal of Support**

When asked why new teachers leave the profession, all participants cited the multifaceted nature of the job. To varying degrees, this complexity was credited with influencing a new teacher’s experience and job satisfaction.

The participants generally expressed that the complex nature of the work of a teacher, when coupled with inadequate support, can be a debilitating force. One principal, Sandy, expressed her concerns about the process of becoming a teacher: “I think it starts

with a kind of a lie in the teacher prep program that ‘Here’s everything you need to know.’, and then you quickly realize that you don’t know nearly everything you need to know to successfully run a classroom.” Jenn referred to it as a “compound” of reasons, followed by a statement which included dozens of factors mentioned in the PIM, and adding that those factors were also setting-dependent. Marc answered this question with a question; “When they’re actually going into the profession, do they completely understand what the commitment level is?... Are we truly mentoring them correctly? Are we throwing them in with a lack of resources...with a lack of support...?”

Anne also expressed the lack of preparedness for the level of difficulty surrounding a teacher’s work, stating that teachers have “...no idea it was going to be so hard.” She mentioned that as soon as they learn one task, another new one is uncovered, and that it can seem “never-ending.” Richard expressed anger at the lack of preparedness, stating that new teachers “...don’t have a clue about the reality...It’s like learning how to drive as a computer game, and then someone gives you the keys to a car.” He also blames the complexity of the work by stating, “...the flow of the day is so fast and there’s so much to do, and there are so many things that have to get accomplished in a short period of time. People just give up...”

The passionate testimonials demonstrate that the participants perceived new teachers to be underprepared for the multivariate work of a teacher, and therefore they need extraordinary attention and support to achieve a sense of self-efficacy and eventual job satisfaction.

### **Perceived Lack of Administrative Training on Issues/Effects of New Teacher Attrition**

This small sample of principals revealed that they perceived themselves to have received inadequate training around the issue of new teacher retention/attrition cycles and factors. All of the participants, when asked what training they had received from their administration programs about retention statistics and factors reported that they received little to no training.

Sandy reported that her principal certification program that she completed in the 1980's lacked practical application in general. She said, "It didn't prepare me. What I needed to know, I learned on the job – by the seat of my pants." The participants reported vague, fleeting conversations about what it "felt like" to be a new teacher, or remember an article that may have addressed the issue, but none reported adequate formal training on issues of retention and the effect that retention had on school functioning. Marc, who reported that his administration program did address issues that were easily applied to his work, also stated that his preparation program fell short on training about how to support individual people for the purpose of retention. He said, "There was nothing. I can't sit here and say we had this terrific program that talked really about relationship-building, about looking after people, taking care of your most valuable resource you've got which are your staff, your teachers. The real focus is about administrative paperwork initiatives."

One participant, Anne, did not enroll in a formal administration program because she was asked to take a principal position that opened unexpectedly. Because of the alternative certification process, she did not take a typical sequence of administration courses. She did go on to question the importance of the coursework. Her belief was that

if she could successfully cultivate and support a collegial learning community and maintain a high retention rate without having engaged in coursework, then the courses must just be supplemental, and not crucial. She went on to report that her district also did not “pay attention” to its own retention statistics. She attributed this lack of attention to the steady, high rate of retention district-wide. She concluded, ironically, that this lack of intentional focus on retention of new teachers in the district was a threat to the high rate itself. “If we don’t pay attention to that,” she said, “then maybe we’ll just lose what we have that is so good.”

None of the participants reported that they entered their work as principals with adequate knowledge of the factors surrounding teacher retention rates, and the affect that those retention rates can have on a school culture.

### **“Good” Teaching Has Many Definitions**

The principals in this study had all had differing answers to the question “what makes a teacher ‘good’ or worth retaining?” It should be noted that as this study was being conducted, the schools were preparing for, or implementing a new state teacher evaluation system. Yet, when asked “what makes a teacher ‘good’?” many definitions arose. Furthermore, results indicated that all answers to this question by the participants were partnered with a disclaimer about how subjective that assessment can be.

“There’s no objective way of looking at it,” Richard began, but he went on to try to articulate an answer about a teacher’s ability to demonstrate improvement: “I mean you walk in and you don’t see things changing..., and the same mistakes are happening, the same lack of cogent programming. I can deal with somebody in their first year not

really having a clue what they're doing and it being just an unmitigated disaster.

Unfortunately that is part of the game, but if that second year isn't significantly better..., then why wait for the third year?" Richard went on in his description of how to assess a "good" teacher:

...I think a good teacher is able to relate well to kids, has a really good understanding of the content, is able to deliver the content in a way that's interesting and engaging and exciting, motivates kids, and is able to set up a classroom that kids want to come to. So, you can't quantify something like that. ...I walked into a classroom once, and I was appalled. There was very little on the walls other than a multiplication chart ... and a poster for Mexico or something. There was a lectern that the teacher stood behind, and there were desks. That was it. The minute I walked into that classroom I knew I was looking at a substandard classroom. I mean, there was nothing alive about it. ...The teacher wasn't even there.

Sandy warned that her answer was going to "be a little creepy, new aged, but there is an intuitive sense that I have about people." She went on to articulate that when she watches a new teacher interact with a child, she needs to see...

"...that they are fully focused on that child at the moment, and it can be assured, as a 10-second interaction, that the child walks away knowing that their needs have been met. The teacher may not even remember the interaction because they're on to the next thing, but that doesn't matter. I am watching the child's response. I watch the same thing with the teacher interacting with the parents, that same level of 'I'm connected to you right now. You're the most important thing that is happening in my world right now,' and the parent walks away feeling [he/she] has been heard. ...It's an intuitive...it's intangible, but, dammit, it exists. ...Oh, God, don't ask me how to measure it!"

Two principals even reported that they believed themselves to be able to tell who be an effective teacher just by having a conversation with them in an interview. Marc describes that he assesses a new teacher's level of passion for the work in his assessment. He describes, "There is a desire component to it....and you can genuinely see that when you sit down with somebody, and you chat with them, and you say 'my goodness, you've

got something. You might not be able to get it out yet, and you may not have the skill set to be able to fine-tune that, but it's worth looking at.' And the shame of it is that we rush to discard without allowing people those opportunities to develop."

Jenn reported that she knows "...on a gut level...just like I know 30 seconds into a lesson if it's going to be good or not...you pick up on the feeling." She went on to describe a comparison of two different classrooms:

"... 'How do you know a great teacher or a good teacher who's doing well?' There's all kinds of signs. ...you're going to have teachers who make kids feel good, but there's not a whole lot of learning going on. So, it's a balance between walking in and feeling there's this energy in the air where kids are engaged, you see really good things around the room: student work. I walked into a classroom the other day...she's doing this Venne Diagram, but the way she managed to keep every bit of eye on her, the momentum of that lesson...she kept it moving, so she kept the kids interested! She used different colored markers! She was calling on different kids! She was phrasing the way she asked the question in a different way to make sure that no matter which way she asked it, they could tell her what were the differences [and] what were the similarities by the overlapping circles....And then you walk next-door....and you just see it: the kids are off-task....it's not pandemonium, but you know there's just not the same level of engagement and management and control... 'You had no idea what this group was doing on the floor, and why in God's name would you ever allow those four kids to be together? You [should not] leave things to randomness! ...You've got the four ADHD kids together, and they are not getting one iota done. They are having more fun smelling those markers, but there is not one thing on the paper.'"

Anne seemed to be ready with an answer when she said, "The real professional quality that you are looking for is someone who has the determination and the curiosity to figure out every single student. ...that they never give up, and they never take things personally....And they go together because you can't figure them out if you are taking things personally." She went on to add, "...you can throw the most complicated kids at this teacher, and she'll get discouraged and frustrated, but then she'll come back the next day, and figure it out." But, even Anne expressed the need to draw upon a "hunch" during the hiring process, which she says she does often.

Laura, when asked what makes a teacher “good” or “worth retaining,” was the only participant who mentioned some of the logistical responsibilities of the job. She answered,

Well...through the observations, with my interactions with that person, walking through their classrooms. I mean, I do get parent feedback, if people are unhappy with teachers, I get complaints...Part of what we are trying to do here is do walk-throughs because that's part of the new evaluation system, but I try to go out every day into classrooms. We have deadlines for things, we are doing benchmark assessment tests, you've got to put your scores into [data system title]...you've got to post all your scores. We use [math software title] for math. I can run reports to see: 'Are your children into the system?'... 'Are they participating?' So, I have some external checks. 'How are you doing your job?', 'Do you have your plan book? Let me see your plan book.' So there are certain things that are kind-of basic, and then from there it's through observations. Kind-of your gut feeling. If they seem to be getting along with other people. ...I mean, you have people that tell you things! They don't like things, or they don't like this person, or this person blah, blah, blah, I mean, people tell me things! ...Looking in the classroom, is the classroom put together? 'Do you have anchor charts on the wall, is your objective posted?' You, know, 'Are you doing the things I'm telling you you have to do? Are you responding to the letters in the readers' notebook?' So, I can look at those things when I am in there. You know, 'Are you on time for Art, Music and P.E. when we have to switch? Am I getting complaints that you are never on-time?' 'Are you coming to work on-time?'...'Are you out whenever we have a professional development day? ...What's your attendance like?' So, there's all that kind of stuff too, in addition to just the teaching.

Laura was the only participant who did not try to articulate professional qualities that allow a teacher to effectively lead the children to learning and engagement. Laura's strategy for answering that question was to list some of the external benchmarks of the profession, which do play a prominent role in the lives of new teachers. She did then try to articulate a problem-solving quality in teachers who demonstrate a commitment to the children. She continued, “How they deal with behavior, if they are contacting me if they have a problem child, or if they have a problem parent, like the parent has been communicating with them, or they are at wit's-end with some child, and ‘What do I

suggest, and what can we do?', working together. I know that they are invested in their children in their classrooms. So, that's important."

Laura's responses were different than the other participants in the way that she addressed this question. Most participants seemed to assume those other qualities of logistical professionalism as given, and they immediately attempted to define the qualities of good teaching that is considered in the field to be so elusive and intangible. Laura's response, although it differed from the responses of the other participants, did still acknowledge the multi-faceted complexities of the teaching profession and the multitude of assessment points that must be considered when assessing the efficacy of a new teacher.

Jenn later added, "[It is] so many factors. It's personality. It's management. It's content knowledge." and, "It's a lot of things [that] you realize when you sit from this perch, which is so different because you get the whole-school view." Richard similarly stated, "I don't expect people to have all of the skills ...the incredible wide range (in spectrum) of skills that are needed in the classroom..."

Despite the fact that all participants attempted to articulate the qualities that make a teacher worth retaining, they also seemed to be unable to come to an agreement on a definition for effective teaching that encompassed all of the variables involved. They were also very comfortable with the ambiguity of the language that they were using as they posed their disclaimers about the subjectivity of the assessment. They used the words "hunch", "intuition," and "gut-feeling," and they made no apologies for using these phrases. Not only did they seem comfortable with this figurative language, they even seemed to be defending their description of the intuitive "hunch" by telling me how



many times they had been “right” about their hunches. Even Laura, who articulated that she assesses teachers with multiple external benchmarks, still used the words “gut feeling” in her description. Sandy went on to articulate that she “...absolutely believe[s] that it’s intuitive. It’s just something that you ‘have’. ...and that’s why I am not at all sad that teaching is considered an art and not a science. There are components of this job that you can certainly teach around curriculum, assessment, child development...but, if you cannot communicate sincerely with another human being, it’s not going to work.”

For this small sample, the “hunch” and the intuitive assessment were real and valid measurements that they have come to trust, after years of school-improvement work, and those informal assessments were ways of synthesizing all of the variables that can contribute to or interfere with a teacher’s level of success.

### **Principals’ Efforts Are Affected by Their Perceptions**

The way that principals interacted with the new teachers in the building was clearly affected by their perceptions of the new teacher experience and the issues that surround new teacher job satisfaction. It was clear that the participants understood their role as the school leader to be a multi-dimensional task, which involved the management of hundreds of aspects of school functioning, and those strategies fell into particular layers and constructs of the PIM. For the purpose of this study, interview data examined in this section were sorted into 3 themes that represent the layers of the PIM: direct/personal support, indirect/systemic support, and support for factors coming from outside of the school setting.

## **Direct, Personal Support**

Throughout the course of the interviews, it became evident that the participants were describing the layers of support that are illustrated in the PIM. The first layer of support, the direct and personal support, was the layer that was most articulated and commonplace for the school leaders in this study. It was clear 5 of 6 of the participating school leaders had an informal system of daily interactions with new teachers. Because the work is so multifaceted, their system of support was frequent, open-agenda contact on a one-to-one basis.

Sandy said, “I do drive-bys. I don’t hover, but I’ll be paying attention and just do eye contact or check-ins... ‘How are you doing? Do you need any Aspirin? Is your head going to explode? Go home!’ [That’s] usually my most important message. ‘It’s not going to help if you’re here ‘till 10 o’clock.’” She explained that she also has an “open-door policy” that is difficult to manage at times. She said that a real open-door policy takes commitment and sacrifice, because there are so many things going on during a school day. She also mentioned that she shares personal stories with her new teachers as a way encouraging them to share aspects of their own personal lives from home. Sandy stated that this is an important way of letting new teachers know that she understands that they have a life away from the school, and their personal lives and well-being are important and appreciated.

Richard also stated that he makes an effort to connect everyday with his teachers and ask them how they are doing, and to let them know that he appreciates their work. Jenn stated that she tells her new teachers that she expects them to “drop in” and visit her in her office. She said that she has no expectations for how long the conversations will

be, but they will discuss whatever they need to for as long as it takes to resolve the problem.

Similarly, Anne clearly articulated that she makes herself available to discuss issues that the teachers need to discuss, and that she makes sure her language matches a collaborative problem-solving tone, rather than an omniscient voice. When asked about how she supported particular new teacher that was in her building that year, she reported, “I’m really thinking about her a lot, and she’s right out of school. And, so, I’m really thinking, ‘Keep an eye on [her]. How are things going for her? What’s she saying? What am I noticing in the kids? What kind of help and support [does] she need?’” To further this point, when asked how she supports teachers when they need immediate help in the classroom, she responded:

One of the things I know because I was a teacher for so long, is if a teacher asks me for support with a student or parent or even a colleague, I’m all over it. I feel like you cannot wait one second because they usually don’t ask. They tried everything that they can think of before they ask. So, if they call the office and say ‘I need help with a student’, which happens rarely here, I need to be there five minutes ago. It’s not like I’m finishing this phone conversation or anything. I’m there.

Marc also reported that, aside from being in the classrooms every day, that it is important to let the teachers come to you with issues that they would like to discuss. He believes that teachers need that time in discussion to be able to develop their skills and solve problems. Marc believes that his job as the leader has to happen during the day so that he can respond to emergent needs, but that his administrative duties, paperwork completion tasks, and non-urgent phone calls need to be completed at night, after the students and teachers have left. He elaborates on the importance of personal contact with the teachers by saying, “...if you don’t talk to them you’ll never know what they are

carrying around, and they could be carrying around a terrific burden and trying to get through just the day-to-day things. But, ... you've got to give them ...that sounding board."

All of the participants noted that this form of personal support requires honesty and safety, implying that you cannot have one without the other. This type of direct communication can lead to direct conversations about job satisfaction. Anne described that, when new teachers are discouraged, she reminds them of why she chose them for the job in the first place and uses that hiring decision as a way to encourage them to endure through the rough period in the school year. Marc and Sandy mentioned that those one-to-one relationships are what have allowed them to counsel ineffective teachers out of his school in a way that saved them and the school district from the daunting process of firing. Therefore, the relationships that are fostered by leaders who maintain positive relationships with their teachers can be used to both boost retention and to support healthy attrition, which has an important, but complicated place in public education.

The principals were very clear in articulating the need for direct, individual support for the many different factors that affect the experience of a new teacher, as detailed in the constructs and in the innermost ring of the PIM.

### **Systemic Support**

As the principals described support systems that were more indirect and structural, they tended to use their own terminology and analogies to explain the multi-tiered phenomenon of new teacher support that is present in the current body of literature, and illustrated in the PIM.

Every participant mentioned the mentoring system as an organizational support for new teachers, and every principal, except Laura, noted that they very carefully monitor that mentorship relationship. It was clear that the participants believed that a proper mentorship program requires a strong culture of collegiality, careful monitoring, and an intentional delivery. For them, the mentorship program became the most significant structural support system in place for the new teachers, as long as the relationships were productive. They referred back to these relationships again and again as they discussed new teacher support. Sandy reported that a new teacher's grade-level team was the "first home", and that she was the next "layer" of support, if needed.

Partnering with the strong mentorship program was a culture of collaboration that was fostered by each of the leaders. In these cases, the culture really became an informal support structure that the teachers could lean upon when needed. Anne articulated, "...people know that if there's something that they don't understand, they can ask anyone, and that person will stop what they are doing and help them out...and more than once...so you don't have to worry...about asking them over and over."

Richard, as mentioned above, did perceived himself to have a significant influence over the retention of teachers in his school, but was quick to credit the "structure for success", which is the mentorship program that he works to maintain. He said, "I was really careful who I paired-up because if you have a good mentor, you've got a friend that you can call at 8 o'clock at night and say, 'I'm stuck. I don't know what to do.' And, that's valuable. Invaluable!"

Laura spoke about her mentorship program as the main resource for a new teacher. She did not articulate, as the others did, a careful scrutiny of the functionality of

the program. She discussed it more as a state program that had to be run, by law. She did not mention meeting with new teachers, unless there was a problem that she needed to address. She certainly stated that she "...tried to be supportive of everyone," but that sentiment was not explained in a way that matched the intention of the other participants.

One helpful analogy was Jenn's use of the phrase "front stage and back stage" when she discussed how she supports teachers in her school. She used this phrase to articulate the degree of collegiality and support within the culture of the school, implying that executing a good teaching performance depends on preparation and support from "behind the scene." This analogy matches the layering of support discussed by Sandy, and helps illustrate the tiered, dimensional support structure that is present in the PIM.

From a structural, systemic standpoint, Jenn also expressed appreciation for the fact that she has a school secretary who develops logistical checklists for the teachers, and that this effort is key in supporting a new teacher with the multitude of small logistical tasks that he/she may have to complete. She also reported that she might work with the existing teacher team to adjust a class assignment for a new teacher who may be coming in to a particularly difficult case load. She argues that it isn't fair or helpful to give a new teacher a particularly difficult caseload, especially if there are liabilities or politics involved.

Therefore, many aspects of the PIM constructs were mentioned as the principals described the ways they organize the work environment to support teachers, new and veteran. Their efforts detailed the many ways that a principal can indirectly affect the experiences of a new teacher by the way they deliver and maintain the processes in the school that are designed to foster the support and collaboration of the working team.

### **Support for Outside Factors**

The principals in this study clearly acted as a liaison and advocate for the teachers when faced with issues that generated outside of the school building. One of the main ways that principals had to act on teacher's behalf was in the way that they handled the working conditions of the school that were determined by district and city funding. In alignment with the research on this topic, many of the principals seemed to believe that the perceptions of the working conditions were more relevant than the working conditions themselves. For example, Anne described her lack of funding for reading materials in this way: "...if they are professionally satisfied they will get around these things and understand basically that the community is supportive of public education and they would like to provide what they can, but they can't right now, and there is nobody really at fault here."

Anne also clearly described her tendency to advocate for the teachers in her school when the superintendent asked her to report on the good work of a few individual teachers in the school. She responded to that request with a concern that she did not know how to choose which teacher to highlight. She said, "...you're really introducing competition into your supposedly collaborative environment, and I don't think the competition belongs there at all." Richard also expressed this concern when he reported that he was not a fan of the "Teacher of the Year" awards because of the stress of the nominations. He said, "What's the criteria? [I] have a small staff, and how do [I] choose?"

Working conditions and the physical building concerns were also addressed as the principals talked about how they support new teachers. Sandy listed a long list of

problems with the physical facility, including improper heating, ventilation, classrooms without windows, lack of hot water in classrooms, and a chipmunk infestation. But, she said, "...it's globally awful, [and] ...we are all in this together."

When describing the working conditions at her school, Laura attempted to describe the pros and cons of the physical structure of the building. She mentioned that, despite the fact that the building was old and in need of repair, the school was in a nice location and had clean, safe rooms. Her approach, though, indicated that she did not intentionally address the teachers' perceptions of the working conditions, or did not believe their perceptions to be relevant. She said, "I don't know. It's their workspace, you know what I mean? You make the best of it. There's nothing you can do to change it. I mean, if it was that big a deal, then leave."

Because municipal budgets often dictate personnel cuts, job security was another area where the participants often made an effort to buffer the threats that were present in the city and community. The principals who had to deal with possible Reduction in Force Notices tried to be very forthcoming and reassuring with their new teachers as much as they possibly could. Laura was the only participant who expressed concern that her workforce may be reduced, but didn't report any indication of letting the teachers know in advance. She disclosed that there were fewer students enrolled in their feeder school than what their current structure was built to support. Therefore, she anticipated a possible empty classroom and layoff for the coming year/s. When she was asked if the teachers were aware of the possible threats to their job security, she replied, "Well, if they are listening then they would [be]. You know? They have friends at other schools ...that type of thing."



While considering the demographic variables that affect school climate, Marc reported that he worked hard to shift the culture of his school, despite the depressed demographics of the area. He considered the depressed demographics to be a major factor in the negative outcomes that the schools in the area had demonstrated, and he actively worked to offset those variables by instilling a new culture of social/emotional safety and progress. Jenn also expressed a need to manage the Department of Children and Families filings that the school submitted, stating that the children were coming in to school with very serious issues in their home lives. She tried to manage the effect that that had on their schooling and on her teachers.

With the exception of Laura, all of the participants made attempts in various ways to stabilize their school environment, despite the climate or issues that were occurring outside of the school.

Anne articulated a scenario in which she argued with the superintendent about what professional development would be assigned to the teachers in her building. She claimed that they were not ready to move on to a new topic, and that they needed more time to develop the topic to which they had recently been introduced. Anne also said, “I think an awful lot of a principal’s job ends up being, in a way, protecting the staff so they can do their jobs.”

Participants in this study were clearly committed to filtering factors coming in from outside the school setting. Community demographics, budget issues, competitive district or state accolade applications, and mandated professional development were all mentioned by the principals as needing to be screened or buffered by the principals in a way that would allow the most appropriate interaction with the teachers in the school

setting. 5 out of the 6 participants demonstrated their belief that advocating on behalf of the teachers was an important aspect of their job as the school leader.

### **Summary**

In summary, the results of this study indicated that the participants identified with the new teacher experience by describing their own personal experiences of their work as new teachers and their experiences with their former leaders/ employers. The principals also demonstrated that they have strong beliefs about the main factors behind new teacher retention/attrition, and that they do intentionally try to retain good teachers by offering adequate support and investing effort in a thorough hiring process. They also perceived that they would have benefitted from more training in the area of new teacher retention issues. All of these experiences and perceptions did affect their efforts to retain good teachers, and those efforts were described by the participants in ways that demonstrated a range of supportive actions taken in schools, from the direct/personal support for individual teachers, to the indirect role as an advocate and liaison for factors coming from outside of the school setting that influence the new teacher experience.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION**

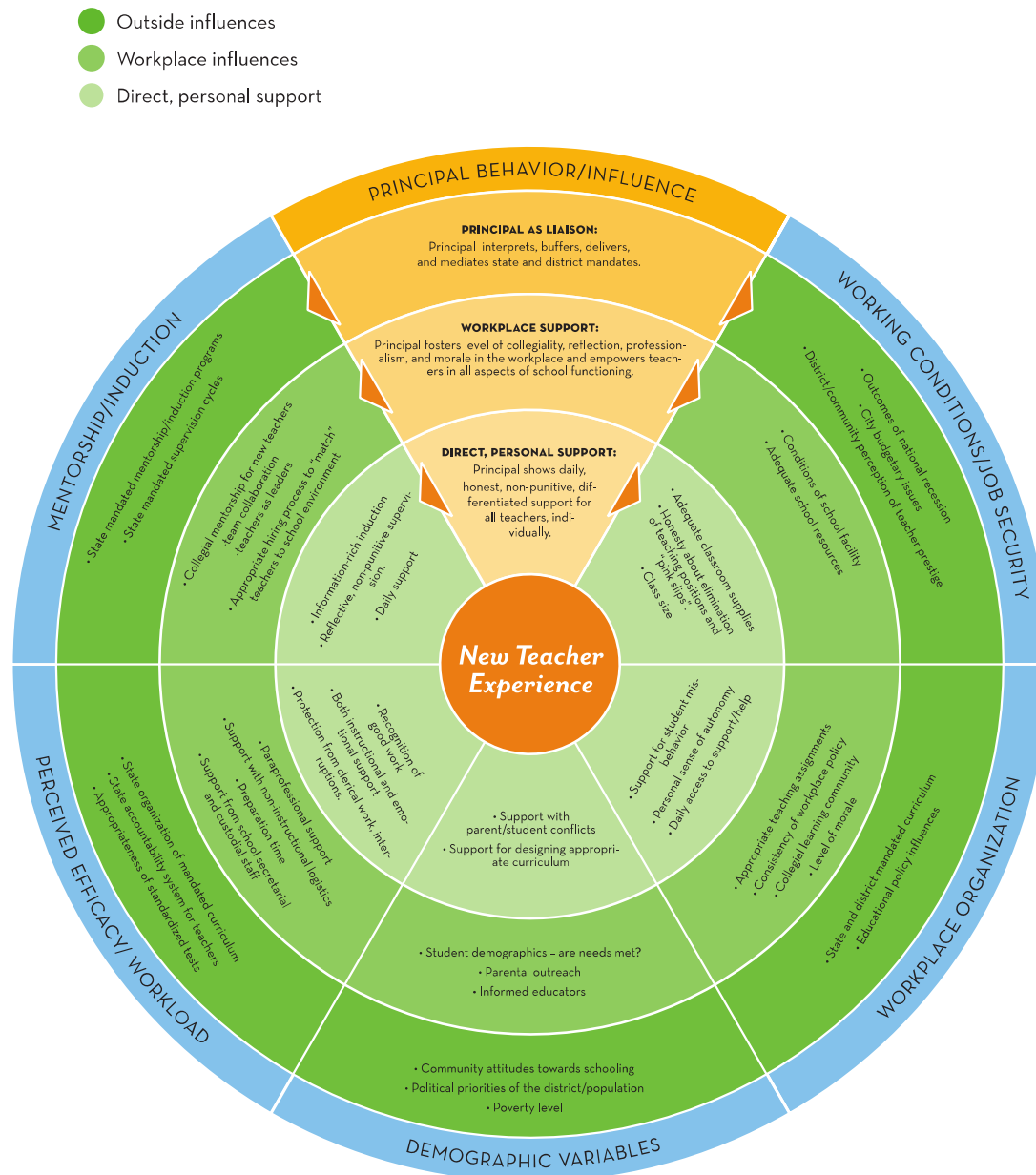
Existing literature on new teacher retention portrays a multi-layered factor analysis of attrition and retention cycles. The findings of this small study interact with the literature in important ways.

First, the principals in this study believed that the experience of a new teacher was a compound of challenges, and 5/6 of the participants believed themselves to have a great deal of influence over those factors. Furthermore, they believed that retention of new teachers was a prerequisite of effective school functioning and they perceived the overall school functioning to be under their influence and, ultimately, their greatest responsibility as a school leader.

Second, in accordance with the literature and the newly constructed Principal Influence Model, five out of six of the principals in this study demonstrated that the support that they provide for teachers is multi-layered and dependent upon proper synergy with other systemic functions within the school setting. Furthermore, they demonstrated the ability to react to outside influences such as budget cuts, community demographics, and education reform policy changes, and respond accordingly in ways that would support their staff and faculty. Although the principals reported supporting teachers on many varying factors, all of those interactions and areas of concern fell categorically into one of the tiered layers in the PIM, and into one of the respective constructs of new teacher concerns emergent in the literature and illustrated in the PIM. Therefore, the principals acted according to the research on principal influence, and

demonstrated that they do interact in a multilayered fashion with the new teacher experience, as detailed in the PIM. The PIM is reintroduced below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Principal Influence over New Teacher Experience in a Workplace



Third, another important connection that can be drawn from this study to the literature on this topic is that the definition of “good” or “effective” teaching was not considered a standard measurement, but instead was a case-by-case assessment of all of the factors that influence the new teacher experience as stated in the PIM.

Fourth, the metaphorical language used by the principals to describe the scope of factors affecting the new teacher experience mimics the multi-faceted concept analysis described in chapter 2, and the complexities displayed in the PIM. The terms “churning ocean waves”, “marathon”, “big picture”, and “moving target” were all terms used to describe the experience of a new teacher. The analogies and intangible instincts that led these principals to making hiring and retaining decisions can only be described as ways of incorporating all factors of the job, simultaneously, into timed decisions about the hiring and supporting of personnel. The principals seemed very comfortable with the use of words such as “hunch” to describe their decision-making. The proverbial “hunch” is an informal, instinctive evaluation of whether or not a new teacher is going to be able to cope with the multilayered, multifaceted work of an effective teacher. The intuitive decision-making, paired with the evidence of multi-tiered levels of support and advocacy, demonstrate that five of the principals in this study maintain a postmodern sensitivity on the factors that affect the new teacher experience, and they believe their own influence to be a crucial aspect of that new teacher experience, as is stated in the literature.

Last, a theme that emerged from this study was how much emphasis was placed on the hiring process. The emphasis on proper hiring may also be an acknowledgement that the principals’ ability to cultivate excellent teachers is limited by the work ethic and personality traits of the individuals. As with the need to select the strongest sapling, the

principal is incapable of remediating weaknesses that may put the new teacher at a disadvantage when exposed to the harsh elements of the profession. This implication ventures further than simply suggesting that principals choose personalities to match the school climate. It demonstrates an awareness of the impossibility of the survival of underdeveloped educators in this system, even with the most attentive and supportive leadership.

### **Conclusion**

New teacher retention affects all aspects of school functioning and reaches out to affect community functioning, when all things are considered. Effective principals have developed philosophies and strategies for supporting all layers of the new teacher experience, and they would appreciate relief from the data-driven initiatives and compliance tasks to be able to properly develop and cultivate the skills needed to support and retain new teachers. In this small sample, the principals genuinely believed that their behavior and actions influenced new teacher job satisfaction.

As a result of this study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Principals have a great deal of influence over the experiences of new teachers, but the acknowledgement and intentionality of that influence may vary from principal to principal.
- Principals perceive that they would have benefited from more training on the ways that principal behavior influences retention data.
- Proper hiring and effective matching can lead to probable, eventual retention.

- The “hunch” (in the context of teacher hiring and evaluation) is an informal, but trusted, measurement of a candidate’s probable success against the backdrop of all simultaneous factors that influence the new teacher experience.
- If new teacher retention is considered a foundational pre-requisite of effective school functioning, then new emphasis must be placed on the school leader as the main cultivator of that endeavor.
- It is possible to display the components of effective support for new teachers into a tangible framework that considers all documented aspects of new teacher concerns.

The principals in this study seemed to detail fluid movement from one layer to another as they acted in support of their teachers, both proactively and reactively. Like the qualities of an effective teacher, effective situational leadership is difficult to define and context-dependent. However, the results of this study have supported the notion that the PIM may be a helpful tool in the conceptualization and illustration of the qualities of effective support for new teachers. The PIM offers a tangible framework that considers all documented aspects of new teacher concerns.

### **Areas for Future Research**

The PIM offers a synthesis of variables that might be useful in the discussion of new teacher retention. The PIM could be used in the following ways to develop its efficacy as a tool:

- The PIM could be introduced to in-service principals as a reflection tool, and they could be asked to report on how their experiences interact and align with the model.
- The PIM could be incorporated into a principal training module, and pre-service principals could be asked to reflect on what they perceive to be useful about the model.
- Current in-service teachers could use this tool to reflect on their own experience as a new teacher and how their current principals' actions align with the PIM.
- Teacher preparation programs could use this model to proactively empower and prepare pre-service teachers for the issues that may affect and influence their sense of job satisfaction in the field.



## APPENDIX A

### INTRODUCTORY INVITATION

Dear,

My name is **Meredith Bertrand Coates**, and I am an Assistant Professor of Education at [institution]. I am completing a doctorate at the University of Massachusetts in the [program]. I am currently writing a dissertation about how principals support new teachers who are employed in their schools. The research will involve interviews with principals in [selected area].

**I am writing to you at this time to invite you to participate in my dissertation study as one of the interviewees.** I would love to hear your perspective on this topic!

Please allow me to briefly describe what the process will entail:

- The formal interview process will involve three, separate 60-90 minute interviews with you, spread out over a 1 or 2 week period. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- The interview questions will cover the following topics:  
Interview one: Describe your life experiences leading into teaching and administration.  
Interview two: What do you believe are the main factors behind teacher attrition/retention?  
Interview three: How are new teachers supported in your school?
- If you would like to participate, the interviews can be conducted anywhere and anytime you wish.
- This is a non-paid, volunteer experience.
- There is no prior research or homework necessary.
- A pseudonym will be used in my report to maintain confidentiality.
- You are free to discontinue or refuse participation at any time without penalty or prejudice, and your rights and protections will be clearly outlined prior to the start of the interviews.

Please contact me if you would be willing to participate and contribute to this important research topic. I hope you will be willing to share your story as it relates to the current body of research on the topic of new teacher retention. Please feel free to contact me at: \_\_\_\_\_ if you have questions about the study before you agree to participate. You may also contact the chair of my doctoral committee at any time for verification or clarification.

I look forward to hearing from you!  
Sincerely, Meredith Coates

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Meredith Bertrand Coates, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts in the [Program]. I am currently writing a dissertation about how principals support new teachers who are employed in their schools. The research will involve interviews with principals in [selected area]. Thank you for your interest in this project!

As a participant in these interviews, you will be interviewed 3 times over a 1 or 2 week period, for approximately 90 minutes per interview. There is no need for you to prepare anything in advance, as I will have questions to guide each session. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed, verbatim. The information shared during this session will be kept confidential, and the tape will be erased once I have analyzed it.

This is a non-paid, volunteer experience. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to discontinue or refuse participation, or withhold interview data at any time without penalty or prejudice.

Several actions have been taken to ensure your confidentiality and protection,

1. A pseudonym will be used in my report when I describe your experience.
2. Your school and district will not be identified.
3. You may ask to review any of the interview transcription at any time for accuracy.

Quotations from the interviews may be included, verbatim, in the final research report. There is a chance that you could be quoted heavily in this document, which may be published in the future. If so, all pseudonyms and protections will still apply. Because of the small participant pool (approximately 10 people) there is a chance that you could be identified, depending on the length and detail of the quotations. You may discuss this risk with me at any point during the interview process.

Two copies of this consent form should be signed if you are willing to participate. One copy should be retained for your records, and the other should be returned to me. **Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you are willing to participate, and that you may withdraw your consent at any time.** If you have any questions about the research project or your participation, feel free to contact me at any time. You will find my complete contact information below. You may also contact the chair of my doctoral dissertation committee for verification or clarification.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Stage One**     *(This line of questioning is about your life experiences leading into teaching and administration)*

What do you remember about your teachers that you had when you were a child?

Why did you become a teacher?

Did any of your childhood teachers have an impact on your decision to become a teacher?

Did you always intend to enter the field of education?

What was your first teaching position?

Tell me about your first year of teaching?

What were the difficulties that you faced?

What were your successes?

What do you remember about your principal?

What type of mentorship did you receive?

What role did your principal/ administrator play in your first year/s of teaching?

Why did you transition from a teacher to principal?

What made you decide to make that change?

How did you come to accept this position at this particular school?

How long have you been here?

Did you ever reach a point where you were questioning whether or not to stay in the field of education because you were dissatisfied with the job?

Please describe those circumstances.

How was it resolved?

Have there been other jobs that you have left (or almost left) because of job dissatisfaction?

Please describe those circumstances.

How was it resolved?

How did you come to accept this position at this particular school?

How long have you been here?

Do you have a former employer who you now try to emulate?

## **Stage 2**

*(As you may know, the national attrition rate for new teachers is very high, so this line of questioning is about the issues that influence new teacher retention in schools, both nationally and locally.) 1 of 3 leave before 3<sup>rd</sup> year.*

Why do you think new teachers in America are so likely to leave the profession?

What do you think are the main reasons behind this statistic?

What do you think makes them stay?

Do you believe that new teacher retention is important to school success? Why?

Do you remember what your college administration training program taught you about new teacher retention?

Did your district provide any training on this issue?

What have you come to learn (about retention issues) by working as an administrator?

Do you know what the local attrition statistics in your **district**?

What do you believe are the main factors behind this statistic?

What are the attrition statistics in your **school**?

What do you believe are the main factors behind this statistic?

How do you know, as a principal, if a teacher is worth retaining?

What makes a teacher “good?”

## **Stage 3**

*(This line of questioning asks what you do to address issues that new teachers commonly report as having influence over their career decisions. It is not specific to your school, necessarily, but you should answer as they pertain to your school. )*

How is the workplace organized to support new teachers?

How are teaching assignments adjusted at all for new teachers?

Is the atmosphere collegial?

If a new teacher needed immediate or frequent support, from where would that come?

Support for student misbehavior?

How do you ensure that the new teachers are properly oriented into the school culture?

What is your system for mentorship/induction?

Can you describe the supervision cycle for new teachers?

From your perspective, how are the working conditions in this school?

Physical facility?

Do the new teachers have adequate teaching resources?

How do you help a new teacher with his/her workload?

Class size?

Logistical tasks/ paperwork

Do they have a sense of job security? How do you know?

How do you handle budget/layoff possibilities?

In what way are they recognized for good work?

What is the local public perception of the teachers in your school?

What else do you do to ensure the retention of teachers in your school?

Can you tell me a story of a time when you may have directly influenced the retention of a new teacher in your school?

Not counting retirements and pregnancies, what degree of influence/control do you have over the retention of new teachers in your school?

Do you believe there is a national remedy to the teacher attrition problem in America?

## APPENDIX D

### CODING ORGANIZATION MATRIX

<b>Category 1: Identification with the new teacher experience</b>	
Theme 1: Identification with the work environment	P1S1,240-241; P2J1,348-352; P2J1,396-397; P2J1,486-487; P2J1,501-503; P2J2,172-175; P2J2,455-457; P3A1,173-174; P3A1,180-184; P3A1,191-193; P3A1,225-226; P3A3,412; P3A3,601-606; P4L1,224-226; P5R1,86-88; P5R1,148-152;P5R1442-445; P6M1,189-192;
Theme 2: Emulated leadership skills	P1S1,227-228; P1S1, 529; P1S1, 535-540; P2J1,898-901; P4L1,367-371; P5R1,506-511; P6M1,255-262; P6M1,599-601;
<b>Category 2: Perceptions of the importance of and the main factors behind new teacher retention statistics</b>	
<b>Theme 1:</b> Principals’ efforts to retain teachers are intentional	P4L3,476-477; P6M3,464-465; P6M3,505-522;
Retention as crucial to school functioning	P2J1,1037-1038; P2J2,275-278,282; P2J2,289-291; P2J2,294-299; P3A2,290-294; P5R2,81; P5R2,94; P5R2,99-102; P5R2,244-249; P6M2,117-120; P6M2,126-132;
Principals believe that they have influence over retention.	P1S2,86-88; P2J1,925; P3A2,92-94; P5R3,51-52; P5R3,500-503; P6M1,481-482; P6M3,418-421;

The hiring process is crucial	P1S3,542-548; P2J2,120-121; P2J2,146-149; P2J2,157-168; P2J2,207-211; P2J3,9:45; P3A2,372-377; P3A3,16-17; P3A3,646-650; P4L3,21-24; P4L2,21:22; P5R3, 12-23; P5R3,28-30; P6M3,281-284;
<b>Theme 2:</b> Proper support leads to retention	P2J1,531-535; P2J2,33-44; P5R2,26-28; P5R2,191; P6M1,277-278;
New teachers need a great deal of support	P3A2,15-16; P3A3,50-51; P4L3,543-552; P5R2,8-18; P5R2, 440-441; P5R3,453-458; P5R3,462-469,473-478; P6M2,26-28;
Perceived lack of administrative training on retention issues	P1S2,11-19; P1S2,37-41; P1S2,176; P1S2,205-207; P1S2,224-226; P2J2,17-22; P2J2,28; P2J2,380,384-387; P3A2,216-219; P4L2,23:20; P5R1,426,430-432; P5R3,489-492; P5R2,134; P6M2,14-78-180;
<b>Theme 3:</b> “Good” teaching has many definitions	P1S2,323-324; P1S2,328-330; P1S2,343-347; P1S2,349-350,354; P2J2,685,689-693; P2J2,705-708; P2J2,709-741; P2J2,778-780; P3A2,468-471,493; P3A2,487-488; P3A2,550-557; P5R2,416-421; P5R2,449-457,461; P6M2,199,203-206; P6M2,236-237;
<b>Category 3: How their perceptions are translated into actions that support new teachers</b>	
Theme 1: Direct/Personal support.	P1S3,121-124; P1S3,146-151; P1S3,449-452; P1S2,74-81; P1S1,456-460; P2J3,20:40; P2J3,30:00; P2J3,41:10; P3A2,107-112; P3A3,362-364; P3A3,583-587; P3A3,624-630; P4L2,9:20; P5R3,111-112; P5R3,182-184; P5R3,263-264; P5R3,300-303; P5R3,346-348; P5R3,352-353; P5R3,357-358; P5R3,378-379; P5R1,219-222; P5R1,363-368; P5R1,409-411; P5R2,198-201, P5R2,374-378; P6M1,520-529; P6M2,89-98; P6M3,372-379; P6M3,413-416;

Theme 2: Indirect/ systemic support.	P1S3,6-10; P1S3,16-17; P2J1,821-822; P2J2,60-69; P2J2,75-77; P2J2,149-153; P2J3,1:28:30; P2J3,1:29:54; P2J3,19:20; P3A1,397-400; P3A3,151-158; P3A3,379-381; P5R3,65-67; P5R3,97-102; P5R3,160; P5R3,421;
Theme 3: Support for/with outside influences	P1S3,181-188, 192; P1S3,197-198; P1S3,321-326; P1S3,338-342; P2J3,1:04:00; P2J3,1:07:15; P3A3,303-309; P3A3,415-418; P3A3,476-474; P3A3,650-656; P4L3,261-264; P4L3,366-367; P5R1,590-591;



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