

**NOVICE TEACHERS NAVIGATING MENTORING
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES**

**PROFESSORES INICIANTE PARTICIPANDO EM RELAÇÕES DE
MENTORIA NOS ESTADOS UNIDOS**

Jackie Sydnor

Ball State University, USA

Sharon Daley

Indiana University, USA

Tammi R. Davis

Missouri State University, USA

Margaret Ascolani

Ball State University, USA

Abstract

Amid the national teaching shortage in the United States, it is now more critical than ever to sustain teachers. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to understand which mentoring experiences and induction support can aid in this objective. Framed by Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, this study's longitudinal, qualitative nature explores the experiences of novice teachers (NTs) in elementary schools in the United States whose critical first years occurred amid a global pandemic. More specifically, we focus on the formal and informal support they experienced while becoming a teacher. Analysis of the data, which included in-depth interviews with the NTs revealed two key themes: 1) deprioritising mentoring, and 2) inconsistencies in mentoring. The implications of this study aim to extend the existing literature, offering action-based evidence to improve mentoring and induction. Focusing on the retention of NTs via support and mentoring benefits the field now and into the future.

Keywords: teacher induction, teacher mentoring, teacher shortage, COVID-19 pandemic

Resumo

Devido à escassez nacional de professores nos Estados Unidos, a manutenção desses profissionais no sistema é hoje mais crítica do que nunca. Nesta linha, este estudo visa compreender que experiências de tutoria e apoio à indução podem auxiliar neste objetivo. Enquadrada pela teoria do dialogismo de Bakhtin, a natureza longitudinal e qualitativa deste estudo explora as experiências de professores iniciantes (PI) em escolas dos primeiros anos de escolarização nos Estados Unidos, cujo desempenho profissional inicial ocorreu num cenário de pandemia global. Mais especificamente, concentramo-nos no apoio formal e informal que receberam nesses primeiros anos de exercício. A análise dos dados, que incluiu entrevistas aprofundadas com os PI, revelou dois temas principais: 1) despriorização da tutoria e 2) inconsistências na tutoria. As implicações deste estudo ampliam a literatura existente, oferecendo evidências baseadas em ações para melhorar a orientação e a indução. O foco na manutenção de PI no sistema através de suporte e orientação beneficia esta área no presente e no futuro.

Palavras-chave: indução de professores, tutoria de professores, escassez de professores, pandemia COVID-19

Introduction

Effective mentoring and induction support is critical in supporting novice teachers (NTs). Quality induction aids in the transition between pre-service and first-year teaching (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Induction and mentoring support contribute to better outcomes for NTs, including improved well-being and effectiveness and increased retention, which in turn benefits their students, the school, and the profession as a whole. This study was conceptualised to better understand the experiences of support and mentoring of NTs. A better understanding of the type of mentoring and induction NTs receive can lead to a further understanding of the causes and possible solutions to the current teacher shortage.

The current teacher shortage in the United States is heavily influenced by the unique stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Steiner & Woo, 2021; Shank & Santiago, 2022). In addition to traditional classroom challenges, teachers today are struggling with elevated personal and professional challenges. For example, Kralovec et al. (2021) highlight several of these new challenges: learning new ways to teach (e.g., integrating different types of technology and teaching formats, Steiner & Woo, 2021), struggling to maintain their health (e.g., elevated levels of anxiety, insomnia, and burnout; Jotkoff, 2022; Baird, 2020), and wondering if teaching is a sustainable profession (e.g., low teacher morale and self-confidence, compounding as the pandemic continues; Diliberti & Kaufman, 2021; Baird, 2020). Further, teachers have shared stories about increased experiences with isolation, mental health challenges, personal loss, illness, and

trauma within their communities (Kralovec et al., 2021). Consequently, NTs are tasked with pioneering their own professional development (Xun et al., 2021).

The longitudinal nature of this study investigates how novice teachers (NTs) experience the beginning of their teaching careers. During the Spring of 2020, the onset of a global pandemic changed the personal and professional lives of teachers everywhere. Novice educators were entering a profession different from what they had experienced as students. Further, this fundamental change did not align with the curriculum of teacher preparation programs. To better understand this lack of alignment, this study investigates the critical first year(s) of NTs' careers. More specifically, this work focuses on the formal and informal support NTs received during their first-year teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism informed and framed this study. Specifically, Bakhtin's theory of ideological becoming posits that discourses, including those experienced by NTs, are often in tension. This tension, however, is what pushes one to learn and grow as one comes to new understandings. When opposing discourses collide, people are forced to confront those embedded assumptions. These are the spaces in which learning takes place. In her seminal work on learning to teach, Britzman (2003) applied Bakhtin's term *becoming* rather than *being* a teacher, which is used in many socialisation models (Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Lortie, 1975). The conceptualisation of *being* a teacher, rather than *becoming* one, "posits a repressive model of identity and pedagogy, in that both appear as unitary, noncontradictory, and already complete" (Britzman, 2003, p. 49). *Becoming*, on the other hand, provides an alternate understanding that frames ideological development as an ongoing process, never complete. This process is propelled by continual confrontation with competing discourses in what Bakhtin (1981) termed "zones of contact" (p. 345).

The importance of focusing on identity development, what Bakhtin refers to as ideological development, which occurs during the process of becoming a teacher has been well documented (e.g., Sydnor, 2014; Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Alsup, 2006; Larson & Phillips, 2005). Britzman (2003) contends, "The taking up of an identity is a constant social negotiation that can never be permanently settled or fixed, occurring as it necessarily does within the irreconcilable contradictions of situational and historical constraints" (p. 42). She explained further that the development of a teacher's identity involves competing chronologies of becoming - the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), teacher education, student teacher, and newly arrived teacher. This process of becoming has been found to occur over the teacher's lifetime, "with the [first years] ...being of particular importance" (Deal & White, 2006, p. 314). This critical first year in these NTs' careers was fraught with challenges and, too often, little support, which could impact their process of becoming a teacher.

Relevant Research

The induction and mentoring literature are a robust body of work, highlighting two sides of the same coin. On one side, the literature investigates the benefits of induction and mentoring. Within this area of research, effective mentoring and induction strategies are identified and the beneficial outcomes of these programmes are reported. Conversely, the literature also outlines the drawbacks and consequences of induction and mentoring programmes that are not effectively designed or are absent from the academic infrastructure. Within this area of research, the literature outlines unique challenges and struggles educators encounter without proper support. Building upon the current literature, our study considers how novice teachers navigate mentoring early in their teaching careers.

The Importance of Effective Induction and Mentoring Practices

The occupation of teaching is challenging, especially for teachers new to the profession (Harmsen et al., 2019). During the early years of teaching, new educators are often faced with complex, difficult challenges, which change and evolve as their careers progress (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Harmsen et al., 2019). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, NTs experienced stressors specific to their professional experiences, such as classroom management (Peterson, 2017). Further, NTs also expressed concern regarding differentiating instruction and developing curriculum (Gholam, 2018; Peterson, 2017). Today, NTs are faced with additional obstacles related to COVID-19 protocols, such as incorporating new technology tools into their daily lessons (Steiner & Woo, 2020). It has been well established that NTs are vulnerable during the beginning of their careers, specifically within the first three to five years (Bressman et al., 2018; Shank et al., 2022; Soleas & Code, 2020). With the added COVID-19-related stressors, the field of education is experiencing challenges associated with teacher retention (Heubeck, 2021; Shanks et al., 2022; Smith Washington, 2022; Ewing, 2021).

The first step to navigating teacher retention is to identify which induction and mentoring practices are the most effective. Fortunately, quality induction and mentoring can be carried out in a variety of ways (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). For example, Chaney et al. (2020) found NTs benefitted from consistent, monthly support. The support can be provided in the form of mentoring, assistance in lesson planning, networking, collaboration, professional development, and the implementation of effective pedagogical strategies (Chaney et al., 2020; Lisenbee & Tan, 2019; Wexler, 2020). In the same vein, supportive conversations, such as structured dialogues can help to refine and enhance teaching practices, promoting both self-reflection and supportive conversations (Linton & Grant, 2020). Whichever techniques an induction and mentoring program chooses to utilise, Kardos and Johnson (2010) note that effective mentoring is a stabilising mechanism that helps NTs gain their footing. In sum, novice teachers want to discuss their experiences and challenges with other educators. This process has been shown to aid NTs in advocating for their own professional growth via feedback (Wexler, 2020).

Typically, the objective of induction programmes is to support the personal and professional well-being of NTs (Horn et al., 2002; Bullough, 2012; Langdon et al., 2014). The European Commission (2010) found that educational mentoring helped to further NT growth in pedagogical development, as well as professional identity development. From a personal perspective, effective induction programs have been found to aid in the development of critical thinking skills, which benefit NTs' long-term attitudes and Ideologies (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Further, the perceived support NTs receive can help to decrease levels of negative emotions and discontentment (Harmsen et al., 2019). Professionally, NTs have reported elevated levels of pedagogical development and professional identity development when supported by effective induction and mentoring programs (European Commission, 2010). Consequently, when districts have quality induction programs in place, NTs experience a myriad of benefits, including retention in the profession (Wood & Stanulis, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Additionally, increased levels of retention have been shown to improve both teacher and student well-being and performance (Wood & Stanulis, 2009).

Consequences of Deficient Induction and Mentoring Practices

While the benefits of induction and mentoring are well supported within the literature, many states do not have plans to implement this type of support. According to a 2019 overview of state mentoring programs compiled by the Education Commission of the States, of the thirty-one states requiring induction and/or mentoring support for new teachers, only ten states require induction and/or mentoring for one year, and 10 other states require induction and/or mentoring for two years. Only seven states require induction and/or mentoring for three years or no more than three years (Barrientos, 2022). One of the states in our study has no state requirement and the other has a two-year program listed. These statistics concur with the cry for quality induction requiring districts to invest in support for educators (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Investment in educator development can aid in the alignment of NTs' needs with professional training and create a more collaborative work environment (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

Without proper support in place, NTs are experiencing elevated levels of personal and professional distress (Shank et al., 2022). Jotkoff (2022) reported that the National Education Association found over 90 per cent of members experienced feelings of burnout due to high levels of work-related stress. Additionally, increased rates of professional isolation are another detrimental outcome contributing to teacher attrition (Simos, 2013). Within the classroom, professional isolation often occurs when NTs are working independently, specifically when there are few opportunities for peer support, co-teaching, or lesson planning with colleagues (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). The culture of isolation was perpetuated further by COVID-19 protocols. Considering the compounded strain COVID-19 has placed on educators, it is essential that NTs are not tasked with navigating their own mentoring and induction process. Therefore, addressing the wellness of educators should be a principal focus in addressing the current teacher attrition.

In sum, this study extends the literature, offering further evidence for effective mentoring infrastructure. New teachers must have support to navigate the first few years of their careers, especially during a pandemic. The literature supports the utility of such support and is clear that it increases teacher retention; however, many teachers are not receiving the guidance and resources necessary to successfully navigate obstacles unique to the first three to five years of teaching. This work takes the first step in addressing this problem by investigating the challenges NTs are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

In this study, we employed a qualitative research design. This approach allowed the research team to interpret the lived experiences of our participants (Glesne, 2016). By sharing their experiences through a series of interviews, the research team was offered insight into NTs' teaching lives. Thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009) allowed us to examine how the NTs described their experiences during their first year of teaching during a pandemic. In this article, we focus on nine participants who took part in four interviews during their first year of teaching. They included graduates from three different teacher preparation programmes to understand the longitudinal experiences of their induction journey. This study was guided by the following research question:

How did NTs experience support and mentoring during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Context

This article focuses on the qualitative data gathered from nine NTs in the United States as they navigated their first-year teaching amid a global pandemic. Each of the NTs completed an elementary teacher preparation program in the midwestern United States in the Spring of 2020. They each had their student teaching experience disrupted by the pandemic, which shut down schools and shifted instruction online. Most of the participants were white females in their early 20s. Further demographic information is included in Table 1.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Race (<i>Self-identified</i>)	Age
Charlotte	African American	22
Kourtney	White	22
Regina	White	22
Kathleen	Caucasian / White	23
Melissa	Caucasian	38
Kayla	White	22
Karla	White	24
Bailey	White	22
Lindsay	White	22

Data Collection & Analysis

Qualitative data collection began during the participants' student teaching semesters that took place during the Spring of 2020. Interviews occurred in the Summer of 2020, Fall of 2020, Spring of 2021, and Summer of 2021. A sample of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. These semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded, ensuring accuracy during the transcription process. Prior to interviewing each participant, the study was fully described and informed consent was obtained. Each round of interviews was designed to capture the evolution and function of the NTs' mentoring experiences throughout their first year. This paper focuses primarily on the retrospective interviews that took place at the end of their first-year teaching during the Summer of 2021. Following that interview, a graphical representation of their mentoring network based on their description of their experiences during the interview was created by the interviewer (see Figure 1) and sent to each participant for member checking (Patton, 2002).

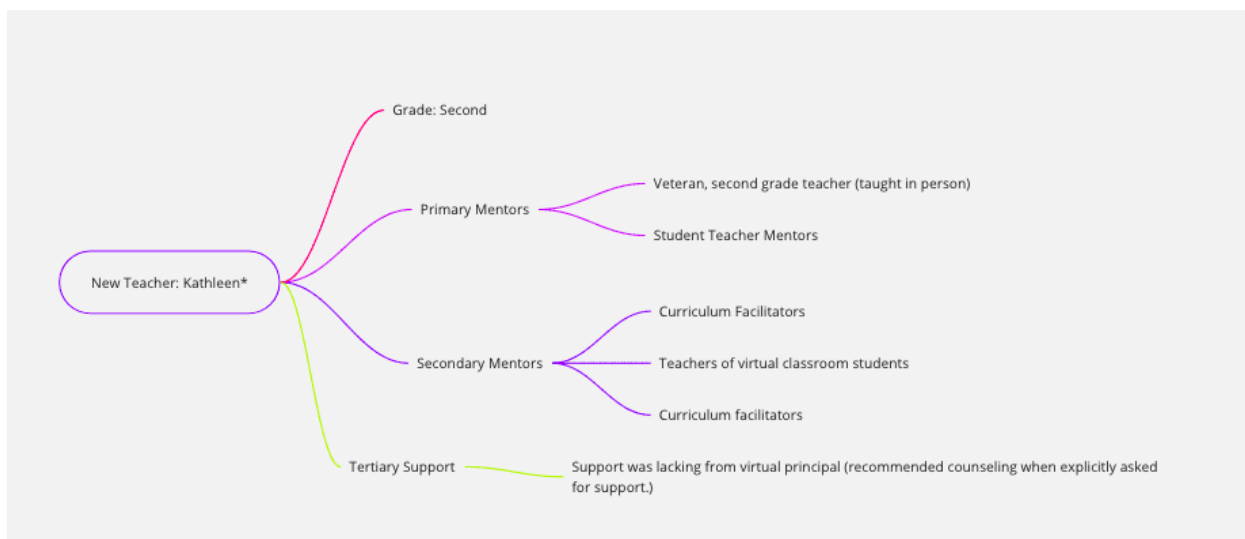


Figure 1. Sample Mentoring Network

Revisions, to the networks, were made based on their review of the networks, resulting in a final version of the representation. Key data from the mentoring networks and interview transcripts were organised into a table (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Mentoring Network Data

Novice Teacher Pseudonym	Grade Taught	Primary Support	Secondary Support	Lacking Support	Network Evolution	Teaching Assignment in Year 2
Charlotte	4th	Fourth-grade team, fourth-grade mentor, instructional coach	Fourth-grade teacher from academy	First month or two, struggling to “keep it together”	Teachers were unable to meet in large groups, more difficult to connect	Maintaining position
Kourtney	3rd	Kindergarten teacher, assigned mentor (4 th -grade teacher)	Cooperating teacher for student teaching	Administration was unable to follow through when support was needed (behavioural management)	Primarily spoke to mentor at the beginning of the year, as the year progressed connected with more people	Maintaining position
Regina	5th	Rose, grade level colleague, principal	Grade-level leader	In the beginning, “everyone kind of forgot I was a first-year teacher”	Began with two teammates, but shifted to one after	Moving to first grade, same district

Kathleen	2nd	Veteran, second-year teacher, student teacher mentors	Curriculum facilitators, teachers of virtual classroom students	Support was lacking from virtual principal (recommended counselling when explicitly asked for support)	feeling like an inconvenience Shifted from teaching assistant (co-teaching) to independent, virtual classroom	Moving to new school, same district
Melissa	5th	Ms Smith, 6 th -grade teacher, fellow, first-year teacher on 4 th -grade team	Support staff checking in	Lacking support in discipline, the principal's office was the last resort and didn't change behaviour	Became more comfortable approaching colleagues with questions	Moving to a different district
Kayla	1st	Academic coach, virtual team member	None mentioned	Broadly, lacking any form of support from both team and administration	The administration was semi-supportive at the beginning, but the support fell off soon after	Moving to a different district
Karla	5th	Administration (feedback and opportunities to observe, team, co-teacher)	Literacy coach, literacy was a high priority this year	Low levels of empathy, high levels of pressure at the beginning of the year, improvement did occur throughout the year.	Disconnect between parents, teachers, team, and administration regarding communication and COVID protocols, the situation improved as the year progressed	Maintaining position
Bailey	2nd	Instructional coach, Vice principal, and school counsellor	Second-grade team	Not noted	Misalignment between support needed at the beginning of the year and what was given	Maintaining position
Lindsay	5th	Fifth-grade team, family and friends (first-	None mentioned	Not noted	Needed more support than received in the beginning	Moving to second grade in the same

generation educator), partner's mother (also an educator)	school/district
---	-----------------

Data analysis involved multiple rounds. The first round was an initial or *pre-coding* (Layder, 1998) which involved recognising repeated concepts. During round one, we coded the data sets from the nine participants, which resulted in preliminary codes. In the second round, we used grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) to identify repeated ideas and/or concepts that occurred to develop, expand, and/or collapse codes. In the third round, we employed Focused Coding and categorised the coded data based on thematic similarity (Saldaña, 2009). To promote trustworthiness within the data analysis process, all four researchers participated in a dialogue to determine the salient themes and reach a consensus regarding the themes when needed. Finally, we chose the two most salient themes based on frequency and intensity in the data and correlation to our research question.

Findings

Preliminary data analysis revealed two primary themes: 1) mentoring deprioritisation; and 2) mentoring inconsistencies. These are presented and discussed in the sections that follow.

“Their eyes were somewhere else”: Mentoring Deprioritisation

Across several interviews, NTs noted that keeping the school functioning was a high priority for administrators and support staff. They consistently shared that the current, school-wide priorities related to health and safety did not align with their training-based expectations when they chose to enter the teaching profession. For example, Lindsey shared, “...it’s just their eyes were somewhere else just because of the year.” She explained that her principal had told her this year was atypical. “She was just like, years just typically aren’t like this. We’re always in [new teachers’] rooms and always making sure that you [have everything you] need.” While disappointed by the lack of support, NTs were mostly understanding of this. She shared, “I totally understand that [the administrators and support staff] are trying to keep the school afloat...I’m just drowning.” She continued, “but it’s okay...it wasn’t personal. I just had to find support, personally and professionally, in other places.” The lack of prioritisation of their support often left them with limited guidance or resources; however, the NTs did not believe this to be intentional but an outcome of “pandemic teaching.”

NTs consistently shared in interviews that they felt somewhat neglected by many of their colleagues. Karla, for instance, shared that “there wasn’t as much empathy for the [new] teachers and what we’re having to go through because I think the admin[istrators] just felt so much pressure.” Most did not feel like it was intentional, but it still left them

unsupported. Lindsay shared, “I feel like the first-year teachers in many districts probably...just got brushed under [the rug]. Like [schools] have other protocols and things to worry about, logistical stuff to prioritise.” Charlotte also understood that mentoring was necessarily lacking due to other school priorities. She shared:

Our [administrators], they were busy - parents are pulling kids out of school, whole classrooms had to go to online learning [when a teacher had to quarantine]. I felt like the support was lacking. But I think across the board, the support was lacking in all schools.

Additionally, many of the veteran teachers who were assigned and/or served as mentors to NTs were not as available as usual. Most veteran teachers were also struggling to navigate new protocols and technology. Melissa described that her mentor was “figuring out what she was doing” at the beginning of the year, so she “didn’t really get a ton of support from her.” Kourtney echoed this as she described helping her mentor with technology saying, “I’ve used computers enough that it wasn’t a hurdle like it was for my mentor.” Further, many veteran teachers who serve as mentors were also planning to leave the profession and had essentially “checked out.” Kayla, for instance, shared:

I had a mentor teacher, and she was really great. But she was one of the [many teachers] retiring. She started off really good at the beginning of the year, but then by the end of the year she was checked out, don’t come and ask me questions.

Observing and being observed by colleagues is a critical part of effective induction support and is typically a priority during an NT’s first year. Given that school personnel were being pulled in so many directions, this often did not happen. Regina described, “It’s quite difficult to go observe people or have people come observe me because that room has to be covered [by a substitute].” School priorities appeared to shift from supporting effective instruction to keeping the school afloat. As a result, the ever-changing protocols and procedures left many NTs to seek out their own support.

“I have to reach out”: Mentoring Inconsistencies

In addition to shifting school priorities, NTs were consistently faced with persistent mentorship challenges. Some were not assigned a formal mentor, and the data suggest that even those who were still needed to strategically seek out additional mentors, including colleagues, friends, and family, to get the support they needed. These extra supports sustained the NTs through their first year. Regina shared that she viewed her teammate as her most consistent support when she stated, “it was nice having somebody that could support me that knew exactly what we were going through.... I would say that one was definitely the most impactful and the most formative this year.”

NTs consistently discussed the challenging environments they were presented with, and the support, they had once expected, was stretched thin. Novice teachers frequently had to seek out support, while others adjusted to little or no support. Kathleen, for example, described herself as the “instigator of communication” in her mentoring

relationships. She shared that once she asked for help, everyone was “so supportive,” including curriculum facilitators, fellow teachers, and even the copy centre. Lindsay also shared this sentiment when she said, “...I knew that I could have reached out to anyone, and they would have helped me navigate in the right direction” but that, “...if I need something I have to reach out because I know that I’m just not going to be on their mind right now.”

For other NTs, the support ebbed and flowed throughout the year. Kayla, for instance, described that her mentor was not “super proactive about seeing if [she] needed anything.” Rather than seeking out mentors elsewhere, Kayla felt left on her own to figure it out. Likewise, during the interview following her first year, Karla named who had been assigned to her, but when asked how she felt supported, she did not mention her assigned mentors at all. Rather, she shared that her “grade-level team” were her primary support, although those relationships were somewhat “rocky at first.” She shared:

We kind of felt like our team wasn’t really working to come together cohesively. And there was some tension.... but it really got better when everybody kind of stepped back and was just like - listen, we’re not going to be successful. And the kids aren’t going to benefit from our lack of collaboration...so we need to get it together, which we finally did...so that was nice.

Bailey, too, experienced support from her colleagues that changed over time and was available primarily when she sought it out herself. She shared, “When my needs changed, or what I didn’t need changed, and I [noticed] who was more available...then I reached out to those people. It was just what I needed, I went to different people for.” While the support changed over time, so did NTs’ perceived need for support. Melissa described:

[At] the beginning of the year, I was [in my mentor’s room] all the time because I had so many questions. And then the longer it went, the more I felt like, I need to try this first, and then I’ll go ask if it doesn’t work. [Over time], I was a little bit more confident in trying before asking.

Others’ experiences were more discouraging. Kathleen had struggled with exhaustion and a sense of being overwhelmed. When she reached out to her principal, she was told she should seek counselling. This immediately shut down the relationship, as Kathleen stopped reaching out to her after this conversation. Rather, she continued to seek and receive support elsewhere: from her assigned mentor, other colleagues, and her mentor teacher during student teaching. Mentoring support was inconsistent within and across participants’ experiences. It ebbed and flowed throughout their first years and varied greatly from NT to NT. The lack of consistent support required NTs to reach out when they needed help rather than having it regularly provided to them.

Discussion & Implications

The findings of this study support the notion that new teachers need formal support, particularly as they are *becoming* a teacher. With new teachers struggling to navigate schools' priorities and inconsistent mentoring, the need for mentoring and induction is now more important than ever. The transition into the profession, which is empirically supported to be most difficult during the first three to five years, is compounded by these new COVID-19-related protocols. Without sound mentoring infrastructure, the field of education may continue to see teacher shortages exacerbated further.

Making Mentoring a Priority

While most NTs were provided with some level of support at the beginning of the year, as the challenges of teaching during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic built, support waned as school priorities shifted. Additionally, modalities and teaching contexts shifted throughout the school year. NTs described moving to virtual instruction as being a catalyst for an “out of sight, out of mind” phenomenon. During this time, more experienced teachers, those who were qualified to mentor, were not in the physical proximity of NTs. This distance made it difficult for more experienced educators to provide informal check-ins and collegiality. Without these once-common encounters, NTs experienced gaps within their professional identity development and growth.

For many teachers, not just NTs, the challenges faced during the 2020-2021 academic year were unprecedented. In some ways, all teachers were first-year teachers. Mentors struggled to navigate new protocols and technology, which contributed to the deprioritisation of mentoring. The novelty of the situation in which they found themselves likely made them less apt to prioritise quality mentoring. This finding underscores the importance of trained and dedicated mentors. While effective teaching is an important skill for a mentor to possess, an excellent teacher is not necessarily an excellent mentor. Mentors who receive ongoing professional development and meet with other mentors to discuss their practice are critical for providing consistent and effective support over time.

Prioritising mentoring is a clear implication of this study. In the US, there is no national policy directing the mentoring and induction support new teachers receive. Therefore, it is up to states, and often school districts and individual schools to make mentoring new teachers a priority. This study adds to the abundant literature demonstrating the criticality of mentoring and induction support for new teachers to keep them in the profession and ensure their effectiveness. Time and funding need to be allocated to providing this support.

Making Mentoring Systematic

Not all NTs in the study were assigned a formal mentor. Furthermore, data suggest that even those NTs who were assigned a formal mentor often needed to reach out to others informally to seek support. These “others” varied from other colleagues/grade-level teammates to friends and family. Several NTs reported that they did not know how

to find a mentor when one was not assigned (or when their assigned mentor did not provide the support they needed). These NTs often felt like they were left on their own to figure it out. This is worrying as NTs encounter many opposing discourses in zones of contact (Bakhtin, 1981) during their first years in the classroom. Without proper support, these spaces can become points of frustration rather than learning opportunities. These informal mentors became the supports that allowed the NTs to make it through their first year in the classroom.

Research suggests that consistent, dedicated mentoring that continues into one's second and third year is critical to improving teaching practice (Stroot et al., 1999). This quality mentoring can "provide a bridge between teacher preparation and practice that supports the distinct learning needs of new teachers" (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). While the COVID-19 pandemic likely negatively impacted the quality of mentoring these NTs received, compared to other years, none of the states in which the participants taught has a comprehensive statewide program to support NTs.

Mentoring support provided to NTs should be intentional rather than left to chance. Therefore, central education agencies (i.e., state departments of education in the US), must enact policies and dedicate funds to ensure systematic mentoring of new teachers. Amid a nationwide teacher shortage, policies that encourage school districts to provide the necessary supports to keep NTs in the profession are imperative.

Impacts on Retention

Moving into their second year in the profession, more than half of the NTs in the study are moving grade levels and/or districts. Participants reported that the primary influence on this decision was a lack of support in their first year. Given the national teacher shortage, NTs were afforded the opportunity to change positions if they so desired as there were many openings available. This movement may have significant impacts on these NTs' students and schools, as well as their professional identity development.

Quality mentoring and induction support is aimed to sustain teachers in the profession, promote NTs' personal and professional well-being, improve teacher competence, and improve students' academic achievement (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Unfortunately, nearly 50 per cent of teachers leave the profession in their first five years (Sutcher et al., 2016). This high rate of attrition impacts student learning and has substantial financial costs to schools. While none of the participants left the profession entirely, the high rate of movement to other schools because of lack of support suggests discontent with their current situations and levels of support and may be an early warning.

Additional research on this unique group of NTs who entered the teaching profession in such tumultuous times would provide necessary insight into how their lack of mentoring may impact attrition rates in the future. Following them throughout their career to longitudinally examine their experiences and rates of attrition would provide useful information for school administrators and policymakers about how to better

support NTs to sustain them in the profession. Further research on the mentoring experiences of NTs entering the profession today, post-pandemic, would also allow investigation of changes in mentoring practices and policies.

Conclusions

Understanding the multifaceted social process NTs experience will help teacher educators, school leaders, and policymakers support, not only this unique cohort of teachers but broader implications, as well. Amid a national teacher shortage, it is more critical now than ever to understand which mentoring experiences and induction support make a difference. Implications from this study add to the literature and support the improvement of teacher retention both now and into the future, which positively impacts student learning and has substantial financial benefits for school districts.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. While the data provide in-depth and rich stories of these NTs' first year in the teaching profession, the sample size of nine does not allow for generalisation across the experience of all new teachers. Additionally, the mentoring experiences shared during the interviews were from the perspective of the NT only; the mentors and other colleagues were not interviewed so their perspectives are not included.

As the teacher shortage reaches a critical state, we continue this longitudinal study to examine the ongoing experiences of these NTs, including whether they remain in the profession. Currently, as they prepare to begin their third year, all are still classroom teachers. Many, however, have shifted grade levels or elected to move to different schools and/or districts, frequently in search of more support and better working conditions. Continuing to follow their experiences with support and mentoring as they make decisions about remaining in the profession may point to important implications about what influences one to stay or leave.

References

- Alsup, J. (2005). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. (M. Holquist, Ed.). University of Texas Press.
- Baird, K. E. (2020). Caring for educators is the first step in serving students. *Transforming Education Through Technology Journal*. THE Journal. <https://thejournal.com/articles/2020/05/19/caring-for-educators-is-the-first-step-in-serving-students.aspx>
- Barrientos, J. (2022). *50-state comparison: Teacher recruitment and retention*. Education Commission of the States. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-2022/>

- Bradbury, L. U., & Koballa, T. R. (2008). Borders to cross: Identifying sources of tension in mentor–intern relationships. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(8), 2132-2145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.03.002>
- Bressman, S., Winter, J. S., & Efron, S. E. (2018). Next generation mentoring: Supporting teachers beyond induction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73, 162-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.04.003>
- Britzman, D. P. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*, revised edition. State University of New York Press.
- Bullough, R. V. (2012). Mentoring and new teacher induction in the United States: A review and analysis of current practices. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 20(1), 57-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2012.645600>
- Chaney, B., Braun, H., & Jenkins, F. (2020). Novice middle school teachers' preparedness for teaching, and the helpfulness of supports: A survey of one state. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(107). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.5001>
- Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. State University of New York Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Hyler, M. E. (2020). Preparing educators for the time of COVID ... and beyond. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 457–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1816961>
- Deal, D. & White, C. S. (2006). Voices from the classroom: Literacy beliefs and practices of two novice elementary teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 20(4), 313-329.
- Diliberti, M. K., & Kaufman, J. H. (2020). Will this school year be another casualty of the pandemic? Key findings from the American educator panels fall 2020 COVID-19 surveys. *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA168-4.html
- European Commission (2010). *Developing coherent and system-wide induction programmes for beginning teachers: A handbook for policymakers*. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/school/doc/handbook0410_en.pdf
- Ewing, L. A. (2021). Mentoring novice teachers. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 29(1), 50–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2021.1899585>
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013-1055. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0161-4681.00141>
- Gholam, A. (2018). A mentoring experience: From the perspective of a novice teacher. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 14(2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2018.139.1>
- Glaser, B. G. (1978) *Theoretical sensitivity*. Sociology Press.

- Sydnor, J., Daley, S., Davis, T., & Ascolani, M. (2023). Novice teachers navigating mentoring relationships in the United States Child Studies, (2), 87-107. <https://doi.org/10.21814/childstudies.4498>
- Harmsen, R., Helms-Lorenz, M., Maulana, R., & Veen, K. V. (2019). The longitudinal effects of induction on beginning teachers' stress. *The British Psychological Society*, 89, 259-287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12238>
- Heubeck, E. (2021). Mentors matter for new teachers. Advice on what works and doesn't. *Education Week*, 40(32), 22–23. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/mentors-matter-for-new-teachers-advice-on-what-works-and-doesnt/2021/05>
- Horn, P. J., Sterling, H. A., & Subhan, S. (2002). *Accountability through 'best practice' induction models*. Paper presented at the Annual American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. New York City.
- Jotkoff, E. (2022). NEA survey: Massive staff shortages in schools leading to educator burnout: alarming number of educators indicating they plan to leave profession. *National Education Association*. <https://www.nea.org/about-nea/mediacenter/press-releases/nea-survey-massive-staff-shortages-schools-leading-educator>
- Kardos, S. M. & Johnson, S.M. (2010). New teachers' experiences of mentoring: The good, the bad, and the inequity. *Journal of Educational Change*, 11(1), 23-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10833-008-9096-4>
- Kardos, S. M., & Johnson, S. M. (2007). On their own and presumed expert: New teachers' experience with their colleagues. *Teachers College Record*, 109, 2083-2106. <https://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=12812>
- Kralovec, E., Johnston, M., Mehl, W., Rickel, J., Barrington, J., Encinas, G., Ortiz, K., & Duffy, C. (2021). The value of a teacher's life. *Schools. Studies in Education*, 18(1), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1086/713612>
- Kukla-Acevedo, S., (2009). Leavers, movers, and stayers: The role of workplace conditions in teacher mobility decisions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(6), 443-452. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.102.6.443-452>
- Langdon, F. J., Alexander, P. A., Ryde, A. & Baggetta, P. (2014). A national survey of induction and mentoring: How it is perceived within communities of practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 44, 92-105. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.08.004>
- Larson, M., & Phillips, D. (2005). Becoming a teacher of literacy: The struggle between authoritative discourses. *Teaching Education*, 16(4), 311-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210500345607>
- Layder, D. (1998). *Sociological practice: Linking theory and social research*. Sage.
- Lisenbee, P.S., & Tan, P. (2019). Mentoring novice teachers to advance inclusive mathematics education. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 15(1), 1-27. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1202633.pdf>
- Linton, A. S., & Grant, M. (2020). Developing a mentorship practice through self-study. *Journal of School Leadership*, 30(3), 238-256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619887549>
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd edition). Sage Publications.
- Peterson, N. (2017). The liminality of new foundation phase teachers: Transitioning from university into the teaching profession. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(2), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n2a1361>
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Shank, M. K., & Santiago, L. (2022). Classroom management needs of novice teachers. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 95(1), 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.2010636>
- Shanks, R., Attard Tonna, M., Krøjgaard, F., Annette Paaske, K., Robson, D., & Bjerkholt, E. (2022). A comparative study of mentoring for new teachers. *Professional Development in Education*, 48(5), 751–765. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1744684>
- Simos, E. (2013). Why do teachers leave? How could they stay? *English Journal*, 102(3), 100-105.
- Smith Washington, V. (2022). A case study: A novice teacher’s mentoring experiences the first year and beyond. *Education & Urban Society*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245221121664>
- Soleas, E. K., & Code, M. A. (2020). Practice teaching to teaching practice: An autoethnography of early autonomy and relatedness in new teachers. *SAGE Open*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020933879>
- Steiner, E. D., & Woo, A. (2021) Job-related stress threatens the teacher supply: Key findings from the 2021 State of the U. S. Teacher Survey. *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html
- Stroot, S. A., Fowlkes, J., Langholz, J., Paxton, S., Stedman, P., Steffes, L., & Valtman, A. (1999). Impact of a collaborative peer assistance and review model on entry-year teachers in a large urban school setting. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(1), 27–41.
- Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>
- Sydnor, J. (2014). Negotiating discourses of learning to teach: Stories of the journey from student to teacher. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 41(4), 1-14. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1090741>
- Wexler, L. J. (2020). How feedback from mentor teachers sustained student teachers through their first year of teaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 42(2), 167-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2019.1675199>
- Wood, A. L. & Stanulis, R.N. (2009). Quality Teacher Induction: “Fourth-Wave” (1997-2006) Induction Programs. *The New Educator*, 5(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688X.2009.10399561>

Xun, Y., Zhu, G., & Rice, M. (2021). How do beginning teachers achieve their professional agency and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic? A social-ecological approach. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 47(5), 745–748. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2021.1945415>

Zeichner, K. M. & Gore, J. M. (1990). Teacher socialization. In W. R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (p. 329-348). Macmillan Publishing.

Appendix A

Sample Interview Protocol – End of Year 1

1. Congratulations on your first year of teaching [during a pandemic]!
 - a. Just to review and get some context, what was your job this past year?
 - i. What grade did you teach?
 - ii. What school/district?
 - iii. Were you in-person? Virtual? Hybrid? Some messy combination?
 - b. Thinking back on the past year...
 - i. What lessons did you learn about your students?
 - ii. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher?
 - c. Looking forward to next year and beyond...
 - i. What teaching practices that were required due to COVID, do you hope to go away?
 - ii. What teaching practices that were required due to COVID do you anticipate taking forward into the next year and beyond?
 - d. How do you think this experience will shape your future teaching?
2. Now I want to know about some of the highlights and struggles in your first year.
 - a. Success:
 - i. Reflecting back on your first year of teaching, what was your greatest success?
 - ii. Can you tell me a story that is an example of [that success]?
 - b. Challenge:
 - i. Reflecting back on your first year of teaching, what was your greatest challenge?
 - ii. Can you tell me a story that is an example of [that challenge]?
3. Now I'd like for you to think about the people who have supported you professionally this year.
 - a. Who were they? (prompt for 3-5 depending on time)
 - b. Ask follow-up questions about each mentor such as (as appropriate):
 - i. What is your relationship with X?
 - ii. How did the relationship begin? (i.e., assigned, you sought them out, they reached out, family member, etc.)
 - iii. How did X support you?
 - iv. What did you go to X for?

- v. How often did you talk to X about teaching?
- c. How did your support network evolve over the year?
- d. Was the support lacking in any way? If so, how?
- e. Which relationships were the most beneficial?
- f. Ask the participant to draw their mentoring network.

***Follow-up questions will be asked as appropriate.*

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by internal grants from Ball State University and Indiana University.

Bionotes

Jackie Sydnor is Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Ball State University's Teachers College in Muncie, Indiana, USA. Her research and teaching focus on supporting aspiring teachers' professional identity development and reflective practice.

Email: jtsydnor@bsu.edu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7686-5738>

Sharon Daley is Associate Clinical Professor at Indiana University. She works in the Elementary Literacy program which is a part of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. Her research focuses on: (1) improving undergraduate teacher preparation; and (2) understanding the reflective practice of pre-service teachers.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4996-0294>

Tammi R. Davis is Associate Professor at Missouri State University. She works in the Elementary Educator program which is a part of the Department of Childhood Education and Family Studies, in Springfield, Missouri, USA. Her research focuses on three lines of inquiry: (1) improving undergraduate teacher preparation; (2) understanding and celebrating the lives of teachers; and (3) promoting culturally responsive pedagogies in both of these areas.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4495-3316>

Margaret Ascolani is Doctoral candidate the Department of Educational Psychology at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, USA. Her research agenda focuses on strategy effectiveness and problem solving.

Sydnor, J., Daley, S., Davis, T, & Ascolani, M. (2023). Novice teachers navigating mentoring relationships in the United States *Child Studies*, (2), 87-107. <https://doi.org/10.21814/childstudies.4498>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2635-9727>

Received: February 2023

Published: April 2023

