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Maria Boeke Mongillo
Southern Connecticut State University, mongillom5@southernct.edu

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How Qualified Are You and How Long Will You Stay?

A Study of Novice Teacher Perceptions of Preparation, Induction, and Attrition

Maria Boeke Mongillo

Southern Connecticut State University

The American public educational system was founded with the purpose of preparing the nation's youth to be good citizens and productive members of society (Burbules & Torres, 2000). With the movement toward globalization, this mission is more critical and more complicated than ever before. Children today will compete with children all over the world for jobs when they are adults. As a result, students today must be prepared with the ability to think critically, develop creative solutions to problems, and communicate effectively with people of diverse backgrounds in order to function successfully in a global economy (Burbules & Torres, 2000).

The educational challenge of preparing students for a global workforce is occurring at the same time that the demographic of the population is shifting and becoming more diverse (Smelser, Wilson, & Mitchell, 2001). Students come to the classroom with a wide range of backgrounds, and as such, varying educational needs and abilities. Additionally, there is a large achievement gap that exists among students with differing racial and economic circumstances (Rothstein, 2004). Teacher quality is seen as an essential part of addressing student needs and reducing the achievement gap because research shows that teacher quality connects to overall educational quality, and has more impact on student achievement than other factors such as class size (Liston, Borko, & Whitcomb, 2008).

Students need highly qualified teachers. However, defining the nature of a highly qualified teacher can be a challenging task for educators, researchers, and policy makers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The federal No Child Left Behind law (NCLB, 2001) identifies a highly qualified teacher as having a bachelor's degree, holding a state teaching certificate or receiving a passing score on the state exam, and demonstrating knowledge of all academic subjects he or she will teach. However, students need their teachers to not only have a deep understanding of the content pupils require to compete in the global economy, but also of the pedagogical knowledge necessary to effectively pass on that information to everyone in their classrooms. Thus, Thornton (2004) adds that highly qualified teachers are proficient in classroom management, teaching practices, and the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective classroom instruction.

Improving teacher quality has been a focus of educational policy regarding teacher education. In the last several years, this has manifested in increasing requirements for teacher certification and revising the standards for teacher education such as those proposed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2007). The justification for these changes has been related to issues of student achievement incorporated into post-secondary education programs. Yet preparing high quality teachers is not only important for raising student achievement, but also for solving the problem of teacher attrition.

Statement of the Problem

Research shows that attrition occurs earlier and with more frequency in teaching than in other fields (Certo & Fox, as cited in Latham & Vogt, 2007; Dove, 2004). In a group of 100 graduates from a teacher preparation program, around 70 actually enter classrooms as teachers, and five years later, only about 35 are still in the profession (Andrew, 2008). These findings find

it difficult to build the high quality, professional teaching force necessary to educate a diverse, competitive, global workforce if graduates from schools of education are not practicing in the field after graduation, and if large numbers of those who initially enter the classroom leave within the first few years. Though numerous reasons exist as to why teachers leave the field, Dove (2004) connects teacher quality to teacher attrition. She states that quality of teacher preparation is one the four major factors that contribute to teacher attrition. Underprepared teachers leave the field in greater numbers; those who are prepared stay longer (Dove, 2004).

Better prepared teachers, who are of higher quality, not only display a high level of content and skill knowledge and more desire to remain in the field, but also greater teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is the "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p. 628). A better prepared teacher is more likely to have successful classroom experiences, which in turn lead to more positive feelings of self-efficacy, connect to persistence at a task, and longevity in teaching (Glickman & Tamashiro, as cited in Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Pajares, 1996; Yost, 2006). Thus it is important to create teachers who are well-prepared and highly qualified to help increase student achievement, but who also feel well-prepared and highly qualified to aid in retaining those teachers.

Additionally, the quality of early teaching experiences influence teachers' decisions to remain in the field (Chapman, 1983). New teachers express that working with mentors and engaging in collaborative relationships with veteran teachers are two of the most helpful supports during their early teaching years (Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin, 2006). As a result, schools have formal and informal teacher induction programs to help foster these relationships and familiarize novice teachers with the culture of the school, but they vary greatly in format and consistency of

implementation (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Though research shows the importance of teacher feelings regarding their preparation for a career in education, few studies have qualitatively examined teacher perceptions about their own levels of preparation and efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). There is limited information, particularly about novice elementary school teachers, as to what types of preservice training and early career experiences they believe would better prepare them, increase their feelings of efficacy, and influence their inclination to remain in the field. Thus, this research will seek to elicit more information regarding novice elementary school teacher perceptions of their preparation and induction programs.

Definition of Terms

Elementary teachers: Classroom teachers in kindergarten through sixth grade who teach in elementary schools housing any of the kindergarten through sixth grades, and possess elementary certifications (K-3, K-6, or 1-6).

Highly qualified teachers: Teachers who demonstrate a thorough understanding of content and are proficient in classroom management, teaching practices, and the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective classroom instruction (Thornton, 2004).

Mentors: A veteran teacher assigned to assist a novice teacher in understanding the culture of the school. Mentor teachers may help novices with the challenges of classroom experiences such as curriculum and classroom management (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986).

Novice teachers: Educators who have been teaching in a classroom for less than three years (Zientek, 2007).

Preparedness: Having the knowledge and skills necessary to complete a task.

School induction programs: The formal and informal structures for acclimating and supporting novice teachers (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986). An induction program may include mentoring, professional development seminars and workshops, and teacher observation.

Teacher attrition: Both the premature and voluntary exit of teachers from the classroom (Smithers, as cited in Dove, 2004). It can be due to inevitable factors such as retirement or personal grounds such as to raise a family, but it may also result from poor working conditions, lack of preparation, and low salaries among other reasons.

Teacher educators: Faculty and advisors connected to preservice training or schools of education programs who have direct contact with preservice teachers by delivering instruction or observing and supporting preservice field experiences such as internships or student teaching.

Teacher efficacy: The belief a teacher holds that he or she can succeed at teaching and make a difference with students (Grant, 2006).

Teacher preparation programs: Programs specifically designed to prepare teachers to obtain certification and teach in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs consist of traditional four-year undergraduate and one- or two-year graduate programs through college or university schools of education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study arises from the idea that higher quality teachers, who are better prepared to handle the realities of the classroom and perceive greater levels of teacher efficacy, are more likely to remain in the field. Teachers' plans to remain in the profession are related to their feelings of preparedness and effectiveness in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Jorissen, as cited in Thornton, 2004; Justice, Greiner, & Anderson, 2003; Zientek, 2007). Teachers who continuously remain in the field feel

that the knowledge acquired from their own education is highly related to their classroom practice (Chapman & Green, 1986). Further, the design of teacher preparation programs, including the student teaching and methods courses embedded in those programs, impacts retention rates, with stronger programs resulting in lower attrition rates (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

Self-efficacy is linked to the amount of time and effort a teacher will expend on a task based on the belief of his or her capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Stronger feelings of efficacy lead to greater, and more lasting engagement in an activity. Pajares (1996) suggests that a teacher's beliefs about classroom ability may be more influential than the content knowledge acquired during preparation.

This study seeks to connect theories regarding teacher preparation, teacher efficacy, and teacher attrition by examining novice elementary school teachers' perceptions of the specific aspects of their preparation and induction programs that have had the most effect on their success in the classroom and their motivation to stay teaching.

Significance of the Study

At the teacher preparation level, the significance of this study is to provide research-based guidance on how to build frameworks for teacher preparation and school induction programs that most support novice teachers to stay teaching. The information from this study would further teacher educator and school administrator understandings of the kinds of skills, knowledge, training, and practical experiences preservice and novice elementary school teachers need to better help them understand and navigate the reality of teaching. Practically, this study will be potentially useful as an empirical foundation for the design and development of the

curriculum, courses, and field experience structures of teacher preparation programs to cultivate teachers with a greater sense of efficacy and increase teacher retention.

At the policy-making level, this study will better inform local, state, and national policy-makers as to the knowledge, skills, and experiences teachers believe they need in order to succeed in the field. It will provide information for policy-makers to consider as they review existing national teacher education standards such as NCATE, state certification rules, and novice teacher support programs at the local and state level, such as the Connecticut Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role teacher preparation programs and school induction programs play in developing the content knowledge, skills, dispositions, and efficacy of novice elementary school teachers. This research will investigate the relationship between teacher quality and feelings of success, and teacher preparation and school induction programs to deepen the knowledge of the supports novice teachers need to influence their decision to remain in the field.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. How do novice teachers perceive the relationship between their teacher preparation programs and their daily teaching experiences in the classroom?

2. What aspects of their teacher preparation programs do new teachers attribute as most contributing to their success or lack of?

3. What aspects of teacher induction programs do new teachers attribute as most contributing to their success or lack of?

Review of the Literature

Since the passing of NCLB (2001), there has been a renewed focus on the topic of teacher quality, as the law charges states with the responsibility for staffing schools with highly qualified teachers. NCLB stresses the importance of teacher quality because of its effect on student achievement and defines teacher quality in terms of content preparation (Liston et al., 2008). However, a more thorough understanding of teacher quality and its impact on the field of education requires a broader characterization, as well as connections to teacher preparation, teacher efficacy, school induction programs, and ultimately, teacher attrition.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is comprised of several components. As mentioned earlier, NCLB defines highly qualified teachers as a function of content knowledge, and it connects to the teacher's ability to raise student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Another school of thought suggests that in addition to content knowledge, a highly qualified teacher also has pedagogical knowledge, skills such as classroom management, and the dispositions teachers require (Thornton, 2004). This type of definition expands the role of the teacher, and acknowledges the impact teachers have not only on student achievement, but also on educating the whole child. Many teacher preparation programs advocate this notion of teacher quality because it reflects an understanding that it takes more than subject matter knowledge to create an effective and caring teacher to which students can respond (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Amobi (2006) adds that another integral part of preparing highly qualified teachers is building the teachers' abilities to reflect upon their own practice and "empower them to personalize and own the craft of teaching" (p. 24). This suggests that building teacher quality is a recurring process that extends beyond formal preparation and persists throughout the career.

Teachers need initial training in the best classroom practices, but the also the ability to continually refine, develop, and expand their capacity to co-construct knowledge from their craft.

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation programs that produce higher quality teachers consider the content of teacher education, the learning process through which teachers gain readiness, and the contexts in which teachers develop their practice (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). The effectiveness increases when the program is designed around a vision of learning and teaching that provides coherence for all coursework and field experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

Lortie (as cited in Hammerness et al., 2005) describes the "apprenticeship of observation," which is the process by which teachers have learned about teaching from being students during their lifetimes. The "apprenticeship" can result in misconceptions about the actual job of teaching, which can frustrate teachers when they actually enter their own classrooms and find they have unreal expectations about the work of being a teacher. Teacher preparation programs need to address these preservice teachers' preconceived ideas about teaching.

A teacher's preparation for the classroom impacts teacher attrition (Chapman & Green, 1986; Dove, 2004). Teachers experience job dissatisfaction because they view a discrepancy between theory and classroom practice (Thornton, 2004). Teachers see a disconnect between their knowledge of best teaching practices and the demands of state and federal mandates. Teachers also struggle with the ability to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, and these demands influence their career plans (Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007; Thornton, 2004).

Teachers refer to the difference between their expectations about their work as a teacher and the actual experience of being in the classroom as one of the most frequent reasons for leaving the field (Jensen, Meyers, & Mortorff, as cited in Thornton, 2004). Teacher programs that include experiences that connect theory and practice, and provide more in-depth opportunities to spend time in schools may better prepare teachers for classroom realities (Latham & Vogt, 2007). Many novice teachers cite field experience as being the most important part of their preparation (Ryan, et al, 1979). Providing preservice teachers with early field experiences, both before and during their engagement with coursework, appears to help them make stronger connections between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

The challenge for teacher educators, who are charged with the task of preparing high quality teachers, lies in the fact that teacher preparation programs cannot fully develop all of the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Hammerness et al., 2005). Teacher preparation programs must generalize their instruction, though teachers will function in highly specific and contextually bound schools (Ryan et al., 1979). As teacher education must have some limitation in scope, it is important for teacher educators to know the most common needs of novice teachers to create teacher education curricula and preservice experiences in all types of preparation programs that will have the greatest impact on building teacher quality.

Teacher Efficacy

Preparedness is tightly linked to teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is the belief a teacher holds that he or she will be successful in the classroom and make a difference in the lives of students (Grant, 2006). Higher levels of efficacy lead to greater resilience and persistence (Pajares, 1996). Efficacy has to do with the teachers' perception of their ability to educate students, but not their actual level of proficiency (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1996). However,

novice and preservice teacher efficacy increases with each successful teaching experience, and a teacher with greater proficiency is more likely to be able to achieve positive classroom results (Yost, 2006). Thus, teacher preparation programs should address both "raising competence and confidence primarily through successful authentic mastery experiences" (Yost, 2006, p. 61, emphasis in the original).

Onafowora (2005) suggests that there is an affective aspect of teaching that effects how new teachers perceive their efficacy and that it develops at a slower rate than their cognitive abilities. Teachers may enter the field with a confidence in their knowledge of what should occur in the classroom, but experience a decrease in confidence as they react emotionally to the way their students respond to instruction and interact within the classroom.

Novice teachers experience the most stress from dealing with parents and coping with the school pressures to perform on state standardized tests. They also are concerned with classroom management and the need to individualize instruction to most impact student learning (Onafowora, 2005; Rieg et al., 2007). In addition, teachers find challenges in dealing with more experienced colleagues and classroom aides, prioritizing work, and the pacing of lessons (Yost, 2006).

School Induction Programs for Novice Teachers

Along with the level of preparedness, the amount of collaboration new teachers experience with their colleagues impacts both teacher quality and teacher attrition rates. The purpose of school induction programs is to enable novice teachers to assimilate into the culture of the school and support novice teachers as they transition from student to teacher (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986). As such, it continues to prepare teachers for their classroom work. Through mentoring, professional development, and other types of assistance, induction programs help

inexperienced teachers translate general coursework theory into contextual practice in their classrooms, and thus further develop their knowledge and skills as teachers.

In addition, collaborative groups positively influence new teachers' desire to stay in the field, and new teachers most value collaboration as a support (Andrews et al., 2006; Haun & Martin, 2004). Engaging in collaboration with other teachers and participating in mentoring programs with veteran teachers are the supports new teachers cite as being most useful (Andrews et al., 2006). Induction programs that utilize mentoring models, that focus support in a collegial, classroom-based manner, have more effect on teaching practices than those that are workshop based (Wei, et al, 2009).

School induction programs influence teacher retention based upon the type of support novice teachers receive (Smith & Ingersoll, as cited in Wei, et al., 2009). Teachers specify that the best supports are having a mentor who teaches the same subject, engaging in common planning time and collaboration with other teachers, and belonging to a extended group of teachers. These supports reduce teacher attrition by half (Smith & Ingersoll, as cited in Wei, et al., 2009). Likewise, teachers who have collective responsibility for students are more likely to remain in the classroom (Haun & Martin, 2004).

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition is the premature and voluntary exit of teachers from the classroom (Smithers, as cited in Dove, 2004). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that in the 2003-2004 school year, 8.4% of teachers left the profession, an increase from the 1999-2001 rate of 7.4% (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2006). Teacher attrition rates are highest among teachers early in their careers, with 30% who will exit the classroom doing so during the first three years of teaching, and 50%

leaving within five years (Johnson, as cited in Dove, 2004). Additionally, teachers are leaving the profession far earlier in their careers than members of other professions (Certo & Fox, as cited in Latham & Vogt, 2007; Dove, 2004;).

Numerous reasons exist as to why teachers leave the field, particularly in the early years. Dove (2004) cites salary, quality of teacher preparation, conditions that affect service, and working conditions as the four major reasons for teacher attrition. Working conditions include stress-related factors that leave teachers feeling an inability to cope (Rieg et al., 2007). Chapman (1983) offers a model of the influences on teacher attrition. The model states six factors that influence teacher retention: teacher's personal characteristics, educational preparation, initial commitment to teaching, quality of first teaching experience, professional and social integration into teaching, and external influences, such as the employment climate and ability to find work in other fields. All six factors impact job satisfaction, which in turn relate to longevity in the field. However, this study focuses specifically on how teacher preparation and school induction programs affect teacher attrition.

Research Design

This study used qualitative research methods to explore the complex and varied experiences of novice teachers to develop thick descriptions of teacher preparation and induction programs from the teachers' perspectives. Previous research has used quantitative data to conclude that there is an important effect of preparation and efficacy on teacher attrition rates. However, little qualitative research has been carried out to more fully evaluate teacher perceptions and uncover the specific aspects of teacher preparation and induction that are most meaningful to novice teachers.

To begin to expand the understanding of teacher perceptions, the researcher conducted one individual interview, semi-structured because time was limited, with each teacher. The initial scheduled interview time blocks were 45 minutes in length. Through the interview, the researcher explored each individual's perceptions of their classroom success and the training and professional development opportunities that they attribute as most aiding that success.

Site and Participant Selection

Participants in this study would all ideally come from elementary schools. However, as the researcher was limited by the time frame for this study, she chose participants from two Connecticut schools, one middle school and one elementary school, to which she has access through friends and colleagues. The middle school is a charter school located in an urban setting. The elementary school is a public school in a small, suburban town. There were a total of five participants, with two from the middle school and three from the elementary school. Participants were contacted via e-mail and a copy of the e-mail is in Appendix A. Four participants were in their first three years in the classroom, while one participant was in her fourth year of teaching, but only her second in a regular classroom. All teachers were identified by administrators as being successful or high quality teachers. One participant was male, while the other four were female.

The participants in this study attended teacher preparation programs at four different universities. One participant completed a four-year undergraduate program, while the other four studied in graduate programs ranging in length from one to two years.

Instrumentation and Procedures for Data Collection

The instrumentation for this study consisted of six interview questions designed to elicit teacher perceptions regarding their teaching preparation and early experiences within the classroom. The list of questions can be found in Appendix B. The interview responses were collected in late February and early March in one-on-one sessions held at each participant's school. The time and location for the interview was selected by each participant, with three occurring in the teacher's classroom after school, and two taking place during the teacher's preparation period. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Following the meetings with each participant, the interview data was coded and categorized. The study was triangulated using interviews from multiple participants in varied settings. The focus of the analysis was to find emerging themes among the participants' narratives regarding their feelings of preparation and qualification to teach.

The findings of this study indicate that novice teachers view at least some value in their teacher education programs, but they believe the programs lacked the ability to fully prepare them for their experiences in the classroom. Overall, four of the five participants consider themselves qualified to teach as a result of teacher education. The teachers indicated both explicitly and implicitly that there are aspects in their preparation and school induction programs that directly influence their classroom practice.

Research Question 1

How do novice teachers perceive the relationship between their preparation and their experiences in the classroom?

The teachers in this study perceive their preparation programs as acceptable, but largely because they believe that preparation programs are inherently limited in their ability to ready

teachers for the classroom. Similar to the Ryan et al. (1979) findings, the novice teachers in this study believe that "there are things that cannot be taught but must be experienced within the responsibility of one's own classroom" and "teacher education programs cannot really prepare teachers when teachers will go to many different settings." One portion of teacher training comes from the actual experience of teaching after graduation.

In addition, the teachers perceive there to be an aspect of being a teacher that is innate. The teachers who feel successful describe teaching as "what I was born to do" or "what I always wanted to do," and in part they attribute their expectations that they will remain in the field to those self-perceptions. They also regard certain dispositions of teachers as being intrinsic. "Some people have the ability to relate to kids and some do not" and you cannot "teach rapport. That is something you either have or you don't."

Research Question 2

What aspects of their teacher preparation programs do new teachers attribute as most contributing to their success or lack of?

All teachers regard the stronger courses and teacher educators as those that link theory to practice, which corroborates earlier research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Ryan et al., 1979). One teacher stated that the best professor "modeled good teaching practices. He made connections from the content to the way to teach it." Teachers were frustrated by "professors [who] taught classes in the way they were telling you not to teach." The courses that modeled good teaching or required teachers to apply coursework to real classroom settings were cited as having the most carry over into classrooms by influencing the teachers' current practices and materials choices. The teacher who did not feel qualified stated that her courses "were not connected to student teaching" or any other practical experiences.

This underscores the importance of making the links between the coursework and classroom explicit.

As it gives preservice teachers the opportunity to have the hands-on experience of being in a classroom and the opportunity to put theory into practice, student teaching experience is a crucial part of the teacher training program. Though teachers had varied relationships with their mentors, they describe their student teaching as the "best part of the training." They enjoyed the hands-on experiences of being in a classroom, and also the opportunity to observe many other teachers in real settings.

Additionally, the novice teachers in this study placed value on the planning and reflection techniques learned during their teacher preparation programs. Two of the teachers shared that they feel successful when their lessons are well-planned not only for a given day but within the context both of a unit and the curriculum for the entire year. A third teacher extended this by stating that knowing how an individual lesson relates to the state standards helps "remind me of what is important about my teaching." Also, the teachers who feel successful view the reflection techniques taught in their preparation programs as being "key" to feeling successful.

Research Question 3

What aspects of teacher induction programs do new teachers attribute as most contributing to their success or lack of?

All teachers in this study suggested that relationships are integral in shaping their teaching practice and in building their confidence as teachers, which corroborates earlier findings (Andrews et al., 2006; Haun & Martin, 2004). Teachers with stronger relationships with other faculty and with administrators feel more qualified as teachers. Teachers describe their grade level teams as a "support network" and appreciate having others from which to gain

encouragement, teaching ideas, and organizational assistance. The teacher who did not feel qualified shared that, though her administration is supportive both emotionally and technically, she is the only member of her team teaching her subject and as such feels like she "is reinventing the wheel all of the time."

Another key relationship that extends to both teacher preparation and early experiences is that of mentors. The experiences of participants with mentors varied significantly. Those with good experiences share that mentors "influence my work today" and that they "still hear their voices." Others, however, describe their mentors as "not a good match" and state that they "do everything the opposite of how the mentor does it." This suggests that the pairing of preservice and novice teachers with mentors should be done thoughtfully as it can have great impact on teaching practices.

Strengthening Teacher Education

The teachers in this study offer a number of ideas for how to strengthen teacher education programs. Along with bolstering the connections between theory and teaching practices, the teachers indicate a need to better inform preservice teachers about the practical, day-to-day operations of a classroom and school, experiences not encountered during the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, as cited in Hammerness et al., 2005). As one teacher said, "no one told me it was going to be such a juggling act." All teachers used the word "overwhelmed" to describe their first year of teaching, particularly in reference to duties such as paperwork.

In addition, individual teachers made several other suggestions. Three teachers expressed an interest in further instruction in classroom management techniques and finding their "teacher persona." They struggled with the balance between being the "funky teacher" or "best friend" and the "commandant" or "bitch." Also, one stated that current trends such as data driven

decision-making and common formative assessments should be built into instruction on lesson and unit planning. Another would like to see internships occurring as early as possible in the preparation program to help teachers see what teaching is really like, with a second suggesting that university advisors take a more active role in assisting teachers during those internships and student teaching experiences, as well as in course selections. Furthermore, two teachers shared that their programs lacked instruction in special education and the needs of diverse students, with one advocating that every preservice teacher have an urban teaching experience to deepen their understanding of those students.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The results of this study cannot be generalized to all novice teachers. The limitations of this study arise largely from the fact that research was restricted to the time frame of a semester long course. Participants came from a small, convenience sample based upon easy site accessibility. As a result, though the focus of the study was on elementary school teachers, two participants came from a middle school. The limited time frame also resulted in fewer methods of data collection. The initial design and contact with participants indicated a classroom observation component that was later discarded due to time constraints.

Another limitation is that the researcher failed to define “new teachers” in terms of the number of years of classroom experience. As a result, one teacher had been in practice for four and one-half years, beyond the three years limit for being considered a novice teacher (Zientek, 2007), though only two were in a regular classroom. Also, three of the five participants came to teaching as a second career, which may have had additional influence on their perceptions.

Delimitations

To increase the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher selected teachers from two settings with student bodies that had different socio-economic and racial demographics. The teachers came from preparation programs of varied length, one to four years, and levels, graduate and undergraduate. Also, a draft of the final report was peer reviewed and sent to study participants for member checking.

Conclusion

Fullan (1993) writes that "teacher education has the honor of being the worst problem and the best solution in education" (p. 14). The perceptions and insights of the teachers in this study support Fullan's statement. Teachers who do not perceive themselves to be qualified, even though their administrators describe them as successful teachers, are less likely to remain in the field. Of the five teachers in this study, only one said she did not feel qualified and described herself as being in "survival mode." That same teacher was the only participant who expressed that she felt unsure about remaining in the field, and several weeks after the interview she took a leave of absence from her teaching position, and is strongly considering not returning next year. The other four teachers all expressed without reservation that they expected to be in the classroom five years from now. Thus, this study contributes to the theoretical perspective on the link between teacher quality and teacher attrition, indicating that teachers who feel better qualified are more likely to remain in the field.

Furthermore, this study noted that the teacher who did not feel qualified did not comment on students, except in reference to her actions when dealing with students. All of the other teachers described their rapport with students and student motivation as fundamental reasons

they remain in the field, or reflected upon the specific needs of their students and how they tried to meet those needs. If teacher education programs can address the needs of teachers and provide better preparation, and schools can develop stronger induction programs, they may be able to contribute to a solution for the problem of teacher attrition, and help build a professional teaching force that leads to an enhanced education for all students.

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Appendix A

Dear (participant),

I am currently in the doctoral program at Southern Connecticut State University studying educational leadership. As part of a course requirement, I am writing a paper about teachers who are new to the field, and having success in the classroom. My research is looking at the aspects of teacher preparation programs and school support programs that most help new teachers to succeed. I would like to ask you to help me complete the research for this project. I am asking you to participate because (administrator) has identified you as a confident, new teacher.

(Administrator) will know that I have asked you to participate in this study, but any information you give me will be written up anonymously. Nothing you share or that I observe will be able to be specifically linked back to you or to your school. If you would like a copy of the completed paper, I will be happy to share it with you. Though I expect to learn much from you during this study, I hope it will benefit you in that you will have some time to reflect upon and discuss your teaching experience.

As part of your participation in the study, I would like to interview you one time during this week of February 23-27 or the following week of March 2-6. We will need 45 minutes for the interview. Then, I would like to return to the school in early April to visit your classroom while you are teaching.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please contact me as soon as possible at mongillom5@southernct.edu or 203.000.0000 so we can set up an interview time for the next two weeks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards, Maria Boeke Mongillo

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Brief introduction of me (not in these specific words.) I taught in Wilton, first and second grade. I always loved that moment that I called "the click" where students seem to all of a sudden understand concepts with which they had struggled. Though I remember being a new teacher, it has been a while, so I am here to learn from you.
2. "Thank you for fitting this conversation in your busy schedule. I am trying to find out how teacher preparation programs help us in the real world of the classroom. I would like to know about your perceptions and feelings as a new teacher. I have heard you are an enthusiastic/dynamic/committed/successful/effective teacher, and I would like to learn about: 1) your successes and challenges in the classroom, 2) how your teacher preparation program prepared you before you began teaching, and 3) the kinds of support you are receiving now. I would like to understand how all of these are contributing to your teaching."
3. First, I would like you to tell me about your previous teacher training. How would you describe your teacher preparation program? What were the highlights? The needs? What courses or aspects of the program do you think most assist you in your everyday classroom experiences? (probe for type of teacher preparation program, course types and classroom assignments, field experiences, faculty traits)
4. Do you feel qualified to teach? What makes you feel good, effective, or successful as a teacher? (probe for feelings and actions of self, students, other teachers, administrators, parents, community)
5. What type of new teacher supports does your school have in place that are most helpful to

you? (probe for induction programs, mentoring, school climate, feelings about colleagues)

6. Now that you are in the field, if you were going to redesign your teacher preparation program, what would you change about it? What additions or subtractions would you make to better prepare new teachers? How would you improve it? (probe for perceptions as to what was lacking, what was over-emphasized, areas teachers feel less prepared)
7. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing you as a new teacher? (probe for anxieties, diversity issues)
8. Five years from now, what do you plan to be doing professionally?