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Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Administrator Involvement in the Beginning Teacher Induction Process: A Phenomenological Study

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the beginning teacher (BT) induction process influences both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of beginning teachers in a rural district in northwestern North Carolina. While research exists that highlights the importance of an induction process for beginning teachers in their first year of teaching and the need for fostering self-efficacy among beginning teachers, little analysis has been conducted specifically on the role of the principal or assistant principal in building beginning teachers' self-efficacy during that process. The underlying framework of this research study focused on principal leadership as it supports a beginning teacher induction program fostering self-efficacy, effectiveness, and retention.

Data collection strategies included individual, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Analysis of data occurred in three phases: (a) categorization of data using emergent codes through horizontalization; (b) identification of topic clusters using thematic analysis; and (c) re-examination of the data. The analysis of the interview data was based on the theoretical proposition that principals play an integral role in fostering self-efficacy and retention among beginning teachers. The credibility of the analysis was protected by triangulation of the data

through multiple sources, including multiple sources of evidence, member checking, and peer review.

The results revealed that beginning teacher self-efficacy and retention were inherently related to principal or assistant principal engagement through supportive services. The results show that while beginning teachers require and benefit from district-level induction support, they are aware of the need for and seek out school-level involvement from their principal and assistant principal. Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (1) human resource support, (2) environmental support, and (3) structural support.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to God, for without Him, none of it could have been accomplished. Long before I knew I would walk this path, He had already set the events in motion. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 29:11). For His grace and mercy, I am eternally grateful. Where You lead, I will follow.

This work is also dedicated to my husband, Brandon, and my children, Trabey, Wyatt, Aidenne, and Stella. I love you always. This journey hasn’t been easy, and I thank you for your patience and understanding as I pursued a dream I never thought possible. I couldn’t have done it *without* you, but know that more than anything, I did it *for* you. I know there are things I’ve missed, and I don’t plan to ever miss them again. And yes, babe, I think I’m finally done with school…maybe.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my parents – to my Mama, who taught me about strength and the power of learning, and to my Daddy, who taught me about patience and loving big. As a child, you never questioned my dreams and always encouraged me to work toward my goals. Daddy, I would give anything for you to be here for this day, but I promise, I’ll make you proud.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

According to Wong and Wong (1998), "teaching is a craft, a *highly skilled* [emphasis added] craft that can be *learned* [emphasis added]" (p. 9). The mastery of this craft requires years of practice. As such, this is one of the reasons that beginning teachers (BTs) in most states, including North Carolina, receive only a Professional Educator's Initial License until they have successfully completed a minimum of 3 to 5 years in the classroom (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). While teacher effectiveness continues to improve throughout an entire career and is positively associated with gains in student achievement throughout that period, the greatest gains in teacher effectiveness are seen in the first few years in the classroom (Kini & Poldosky, 2016). For this reason, strong support in these years is critical to the future success of BTs.

During their initial 3 years of licensure in North Carolina, BTs receive additional classroom observations with accompanying feedback from their administrators and experienced peer teachers, and BTs must actively participate in the Beginning Teacher Support Program in their district (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2016; 2018). Upon demonstrating growth and success in the profession over these 3 years, BTs are awarded a continuing professional license with renewal in 5-year increments for the remainder of the BT's career (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Kini and Poldosky (2016) indicate that after completing these initial years of classroom experience, teacher effectiveness continues to increase and positively affects student achievement. However, teacher attrition in the United States, particularly among BTs, is on the rise, resulting in the loss of many new professionals before they acquire the requisite skills to affect student growth substantially (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Harris, 2015). While little data exists on the connection between the

COVID-19 pandemic and teacher attrition, one recent study predicted increased attrition at the rate of 19.12%, bringing the overall attrition rate to 9.53% which translates into approximately 58,140 additional teachers who will leave the profession due to the effects of COVID-19 (Dugger, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Nationally, 8% of teachers in the United States leave the profession each year, and an additional 8% of teachers move from one school to another, bringing the overall attrition rate to 16% annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Less than one-third of teachers abandoning the classroom do so due to retirement, meaning that a majority of teacher attrition is due to those who leave the profession at the beginning and in the middle of their careers. Nearly half of BTs leave the classroom within the first five years, 9.5% of them in the first year, and almost a third of those choose to leave teaching altogether (Abitabile, 2020). According to recent estimates, up to 44% of new teachers will leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). While a portion of this attrition is due to relocation or career change, it is also attributed to a lack of support and a challenging working environment within schools themselves (Harris, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the dilemmas it presents within education have only exacerbated these departures. Resignation rates in the private education sector increased more than any other industry in 2021, and more than 800,000 people left jobs in state and local education from January to November of 2021 – a 40% increase (Dill, 2022). Among the Northeastern states, resignations in the education sector have outpaced all other industries since

January 2021 (Mollica & Cambon, 2021). Nationwide, while the "Great Resignation"[1] is currently driven by attrition in other industries even more than education (Morrison, 2021), a recent study by the EdWeek Research Center found that over half of teachers surveyed indicated that they are "somewhat" or "very likely" to leave education within the next two years, which translates to a 20% increase over the same data prior to the pandemic (Loewus, 2021). Teachers often possess skill sets, including problem-solving and multi-tasking, that make them valuable to other professions in the current job market (Dill, 2022). Many of the companies who are hiring these teachers are helping them to translate those skill sets into employment in other industries, often for substantially higher pay, improved working conditions, and decreased stress and responsibility. As the challenges presented by teaching in a pandemic continue to compound, the increased stress and dissatisfaction that many teachers feel will likely contribute to an exacerbation of the staffing shortage many districts already face (Morrison, 2021).

Barnes et al. (2007) calculated the expense of replacing a single teacher at as much as $20,000 in an urban district. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimated the nationwide cost of teacher turnover to be upwards of $7 billion annually, without accounting for the cost of replacing teachers who transition to new positions within a district (Carroll, 2007). High-need schools, often those identified as low-performing and with a high number of minority and poor students, frequently bear the brunt of this trend with a teacher turnover rate in these districts that can exceed the student drop-out rate. These districts are much less likely to be able to overcome the burden of constant recruitment, hiring, and training of

[1] The "Great Resignation" refers to the approximately 33 million Americans who left their jobs since the spring of 2021 (Rosalsky, 2022), with an average of 3.98 million workers quitting each month during the COVID-19 pandemic (Society for Human Resource Management, 2022).

teachers, and the financial expense for schools and districts is becoming increasingly challenging to fund.

The cost to schools and students in terms of decreased effectiveness and student growth is more challenging to quantify but no less tangible. Teacher effectiveness is the single most important factor in boosting student growth and achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Weisberg et al., 2009). According to Weisberg et al. (2009), students who are assigned to high-quality, highly-effective teachers can gain up to a year's additional growth compared to students who are instructed by a less effective teacher. Teacher effectiveness contributes to noncognitive improvements for students, as well. Kini and Podolsky (2016) found a strong link between high rates of student absenteeism and negative outcomes for a student's educational career that can lead to decreased engagement and an increased likelihood of becoming a high school dropout. Students whose teachers have more experience, and, therefore, an increased likelihood of classroom effectiveness, have lower rates of chronic absenteeism, which may mean greater academic success throughout their educational career.

School culture is critical for student achievement (Moses, 2019). Successful schools are characterized by positive organizational relationships, with a strong emphasis on collaboration between staff members and meeting students' needs. Trust is the foundation of that culture which is built over time as staff members become increasingly comfortable with their colleagues and their expectations and abilities. High teacher attrition has a negative effect on school culture, regardless of the school's classification as low- or high-performing or its percentage of economically disadvantaged students (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). When a school's staff is in a constant state of flux, teachers begin to operate in isolation and have little opportunity to build

the necessary trust to function at high levels (Moses, 2019). The combination of a frequently changing school faculty and the introduction of an increasing number of inexperienced educators can present a distinct challenge for the accomplishment of a school's educational objectives (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Sorensen & Ladd found that schools with a high degree of teacher turnover were more likely to continue to experience high attrition in subsequent years, perpetuating the cycle of lower-quality instructional staff and lower-quality interpersonal relationships, which negatively affected student achievement over an extended period of time.

Research indicates that greater self-efficacy for teachers leads to increased job satisfaction, decreased job-related stress, and fewer instances of student misconduct in the classroom (Barni et al., 2019; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Zakariya, 2020). Job satisfaction is critical to retaining teachers, as dissatisfaction is one of the top-cited reasons many give as important or extremely important in their decisions to leave education (Sutcher et al., 2016). In North Carolina, dissatisfaction accounted for 1.9% of attrition for the 2018-2019 school year, an increase of 11.4% over the previous year's reporting (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Teacher efficacy is an important component of teacher effectiveness, with a direct link between a teacher's personal agency, or the ability to identify and accomplish tasks, and the capacity to translate that personal agency into tangible experiences in the classroom (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Teachers with greater self-efficacy are more effective in the classroom thereby improving student achievement in a variety of academic subjects. High self-efficacy leads to better classroom management, greater persistence in assisting struggling students, more robust lesson planning and implementation, and a greater likelihood of setting high-performance goals for both teachers and their students. A better-structured classroom presents opportunities for

students to experience success and achievement and to meet those high-performance goals – thus indicating a need for increased self-efficacy among teachers for improved student achievement. Bray-Clark and Bates also demonstrate that teacher self-efficacy influences effectiveness in the entire school, not just within their classrooms. Higher-performing schools often employ teachers with greater self-efficacy which influences school-wide culture and overall educational effectiveness. Hattie's (2008) research indicates that, with an effect size of 1.57, collective teacher efficacy has the greatest opportunity for affecting student achievement.

The early years in the profession are widely accepted as those of least effectiveness (Weisberg et al., 2009), prompting many states to implement various supports for BTs that include trained mentors, targeted professional development, and additional classroom observations. These interventions support BTs in developing skills to improve experience and teacher quality; however, with a national attrition rate of 44% for teachers in their first 5 years (Will, 2018), nearly half of these BTs will leave the profession before they have the opportunity to develop their craft and gain the necessary skills to be considered effective. As such a large number of BTs leave the field before they have the opportunity to become master teachers, students are less likely to be taught by educators who have gained the necessary experience to affect student growth positively – an experience that can have detrimental effects for students long into adulthood (Hanushek, 2012).

With fewer enrollments in teacher preparation programs (Hinchcliffe, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016) and with nearly half of those who become teachers leaving within their first 5 years in the classroom (Will, 2018), it is more critical than ever that BTs receive support that improves their classroom effectiveness and strengthens their self-efficacy. Research indicates that principal engagement with teachers is an essential factor for school culture, overall job satisfaction, and

the decision to remain in a specific school (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). One of the most important factors in teacher retention within a school, or even the profession, is the leadership and support of the principal. Teachers in schools with more effective principals indicate that their school leaders are closely involved in individual professional development through their providing encouragement and support for teachers (Whitaker, 2020) which demonstrates a need for principals and assistant principals to take a direct hand in the BT induction process. However, little research clarifies the role of principal or assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process or that involvement's effect on BTs' self-efficacy and retention; many principals feel ill-equipped to fulfill that role if it were well-defined (Holland, 2009).

Significance

This study may help distinguish the role of principals and assistant principals in the BT induction process and its influence on self-efficacy and teacher retention, as perceived by BTs. Its results may inform principals as to their influence on BTs' perceptions of self-efficacy and potential retention. The findings may also assist district office staff and those who plan BT experiences with guiding principal involvement that maximizes their participation in the BT induction process.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction process influences both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of BTs in a rural district in northwestern North Carolina. To maintain anonymity, the district will use the pseudonym, "Mountain County Schools." It is intended to provide a better understanding of the perceived needs of BTs in terms of administrator support and better

equip principals and assistant principals to engage with the BT induction process to foster self-efficacy among BTs and improve retention.

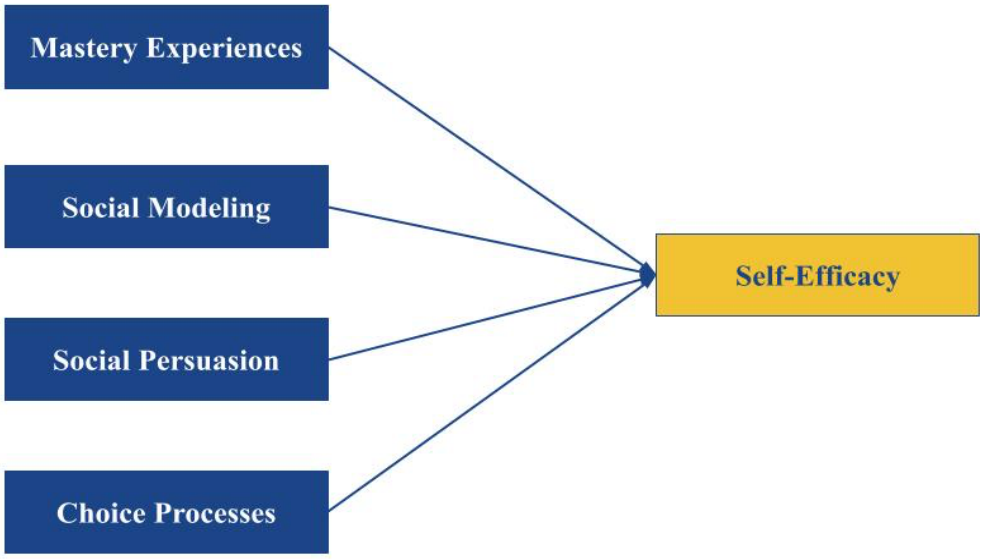
Theoretical Framework

Bandura defines self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). These beliefs represent an individual's judgment of their own competence within a specific context and indicate whether an individual can successfully perform a task in a specific situation by applying their perceived capabilities (Bong, 2006; Bruning et al., 2012). Self-efficacy beliefs are built from a variety of past experiences and social evaluations that lead to a feeling of competence, and they can have "substantial predictive power for performance across a range of tasks and behaviors" (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003, p. 14).

Teaching requires a solid ability to solve complex problems that lack definition, often with minimal direction or time to respond (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). This capacity for personal agency, or teachers' ability "to be self-organizing, self-reflective, self-regulating and proactive in their behavior" (p. 14), is directly related to teachers' self-efficacy and effectiveness in the classroom (Barni et al., 2019; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Swan et al., 2011). Bandura (2012) identified four ways in which individual's beliefs in their capabilities are developed: mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and choice processes (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Bandura's Sources of Self-Efficacy



The most effective method of improving self-efficacy, mastery experiences build resilience and self-efficacy when individuals achieve success through perseverance, not by anticipating quick and easy results (Bandura, 1994; 2012). Self-efficacy is developed through social modeling when individuals witness the success of other people who are similar to themselves and translate that success into a belief about their own capabilities (Bandura, 2012). Likewise, social persuasion involves an increase in the belief in one's abilities through encouragement by others and is particularly effective when measuring success by self-improvement rather than by comparison to or achievement over others. However, social persuasion alone, when unmatched by corresponding successes, can lead to a loss of confidence in one's abilities (Bandura, 1994). Finally, self-efficacy beliefs are impacted by the individual's emotional state, stress level, and mood; reducing stress and negative emotions can cultivate positive self-efficacy.

To foster greater self-efficacy among BTs, they must have positive opportunities for each of these approaches during their first years in the profession. Principal and assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process can directly provide BTs with opportunities for social persuasion in building self-efficacy beliefs. Close involvement can assist in providing the structure for BTs to build resilience through mastery experiences and social modeling. Improved knowledge of the stressors of the first years of teaching can also help principals and assistant principals to provide targeted support for and, when possible, removal of those stressors to help build confidence in BTs' abilities to overcome adversity.

Research Questions

Self-efficacy plays an important role in teacher effectiveness (Barni et al., 2019; Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Strong self-efficacy can encourage BTs to remain in the teaching profession long enough to become experienced teachers with the skills and abilities to affect student achievement positively. The overarching research question in this study is: How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy? To answer this question, the researcher also explored the following supporting sub-questions:

1. What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?
2. What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?
3. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?

4. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

Definition of Terms

To ensure a clear understanding of the terms specific to this study, the following are defined for the purposes of this study.

1. Beginning Teacher (BT): A teacher with less than three total years of teaching experience who has not received a continuing license (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a).
2. Beginning Teacher Induction: A comprehensive, multi-year process that provides professional development and support, including a trained mentor, for each beginning teacher (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a).
3. Professional Educator's Initial License: The non-renewable provisional license issued to an individual with less than three years of teaching experience and who has completed an approved education program at a regionally accredited college or university or through another state's approved alternative route, met the federal requirements to be a highly-qualified teacher, and received at least a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Limitations

While the North Carolina State Board of Education sets certain parameters for BT induction programs in any public school unit, individual districts may offer differing opportunities for BTs to meet those requirements, and this district's offerings may not mirror those of other districts. Participation in the study was also voluntary, and the experiences of

individuals who did not engage in the study may have differed from those who elected to participate. Although 35 teachers met the initial criteria and were invited to participate, only 8 ultimately completed an interview. Many cited the challenges of teaching in a pandemic and the resulting lack of available time as their reasons for declining to participate.

Delimitations

Participation in this study was limited to teachers in one school district with more than one but less than four full years of experience teaching in a public school and who directly participated in the district's specific BT induction program. Their experiences may or may not represent the experiences of BTs at other schools in other districts. For the purposes of this study, only BTs who had completed at least one year in the district's BT induction program were eligible. Study participants were selected from one of the district's PreK-8 schools to minimize conflict with the researcher, who is an employee at the district's high school.

Chapter Summary

Teacher attrition among BTs is dramatically higher than among teachers with more experience which presents a challenge for schools and districts in terms of increased monetary costs to replace new teachers who leave the profession and decreased overall teacher effectiveness. Strong self-efficacy is critical to retaining teachers and improving their effectiveness over time, and the leadership of the school principal is one of the most significant factors in building self-efficacy and improving job satisfaction to keep teachers in the profession. This study examines the influence of the principal and assistant principal on BT self-efficacy and retention through engagement in the BT induction process.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Although one of a principal's responsibilities is to hire quality teachers, it is equally important for the principal to support and retain those teachers as a supportive administrator is the factor most consistently associated with teacher retention within a school (Sutcher et al., 2016). In examining initial needs for BTs in the classroom, from curriculum support to classroom management and access to resources, the school's principal is the most important component (VanderPyl, 2007). An effective teacher can dramatically affect student achievement (Abitabile, 2020; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Weisberg et al., 2009), and a strong sense of self-efficacy has a positive effect on teacher effectiveness (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Leadership from the principal and assistant principal is critical in increasing self-efficacy among teachers, and thereby improving collective efficacy which can have a statistically significant influence on student achievement (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Therefore, a principal can improve a school and foster its students' achievement most significantly by building teacher self-efficacy and effectiveness (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Whitaker, 2020). If teachers are the single most significant factor in determining a child's academic achievement (Herrmann, 2018), the principal must not only recruit and hire the best teachers but also take an active role in supporting them.

Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy provides the theoretical framework for this study. According to social-cognitive theory, individuals whose previous experiences indicate that they possess the skill and ability to complete a task will be self-motivated to do so. People with strong self-efficacy are more likely to view complex tasks as challenges rather than threats and are more likely to expend a greater amount of effort to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1994). When confronted with defeat, they are less likely to give up or blame failure on their inability to achieve the goal. Instead, they more often attribute it to a lack of knowledge or skills or a need

for increased effort – deficits that they feel can be remedied. For teachers, this sense of self-efficacy affects their belief that they possess the abilities necessary to ensure that students are successful in the classroom and to increase the effort they expend in developing their instructional processes (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness are closely linked (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003) and can dramatically affect student achievement (Weisberg, 2009).

Kini and Podolsky (2016) found that teacher effectiveness increases with years of experience and has a positive association with gains in student achievement as the teacher's years of experience increase. The greatest gains are made within the first 3 to 5 years of classroom experience but continue for most educators until retirement. Stronge et al. (2011) found that the difference in student achievement in reading and math for students with an effective teacher could be more than 30 percentile points compared to students with an ineffective teacher. It is critical for student growth that classroom teachers possess strong self-efficacy that will encourage them to remain in the profession and become increasingly more effective. Still, throughout the United States, teacher attrition is on the rise, particularly among BTs.

Research is quite clear on the challenges facing modern schools with regard to school staffing. Teacher attrition presents an increasingly difficult dilemma for schools to overcome (Barnes et al., 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Herrmann, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016; Weisberg et al., 2009), and new teachers represent one of the largest populations to exit the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2016; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016; VanderPyl, 2007). To avoid the predicted teacher shortage, minimize the financial burden

of high attrition to school districts, and, most significantly, ensure a high-quality educational experience for every student, school administrators need to understand their role in the new teacher induction process.

A 2012-2013 survey of teachers leaving the profession indicated that, of those citing dissatisfaction as the cause of their decision, 21% attributed their dissatisfaction to unhappiness with school administration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teachers who feel strongly that their school administration is not supportive are more than twice as likely to leave their school or the profession as compared to those who believe strongly that their administrators are supportive. For beginning teachers, this support is more critical than school demographics or salary in determining whether a teacher stays in a specific school or in the teaching profession (Sclan, 1993). Principals and assistant principals play an integral role in forging a link between recruiting and preparing new teachers and retaining and supporting them (Rebora, 2018). Through instructional support, access to instructional materials, guidance about school and district policies, and suggestions for making challenging parent contacts, principals and assistant principals can offer a wide range of assistance for BTs as they transition from students of education to educators of students (VanderPyl, 2007).

The role of the principal in a modern school has evolved from a manager to an instructional leader who provides a range of support (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Holland, 2009). However, managerial duties have not diminished and set up an increasingly challenging environment for administrators to navigate (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Holland, 2009). With an ever-increasing number of tasks delegated to a school principal within the same amount of allotted time, it is critical that principals and assistant principals identify and focus on those areas of greatest consequence.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy "refers to a teacher's belief in his/her ability to successfully cope with tasks, obligations, and challenges related to his/her professional role" (Barni et al., 2019, p. 1645). Through self-reflection, individuals determine their ability to accomplish a particular task, and their level of confidence and perseverance in the face of challenge is directly related to their belief in their own ability to control and bring about a successful outcome (Bandura, 2001). According to Fauth et al. (2019), teacher self-efficacy is the most important predictor of student achievement. Self-efficacy increases across the first years in the teaching role as BTs become more confident in their abilities to manage situations within their classroom quickly and effectively; this confidence is enhanced when BTs perceive that their success is based on their growing skills (Bandura, 1977). Principal and assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process, particularly in providing emotional and instructional assistance, can positively reinforce BT effectiveness and retention as administrative support is one of the most significant factors in minimizing teacher attrition (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Self-efficacy perceptions are differentiated based on prior experiences and exposure to a diverse array of activities (Bandura, 1997). Bandura found that self-efficacy is less dependent on the number of skills an individual possesses and more indicative of "what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances" (p. 37). In this way, past successes or failures can alter beliefs about one's abilities and can subsequently affect future performances (Pajares, 1996). For teachers, self-efficacy may be stronger if an individual has a past history of success in the classroom or if they feel that their skills and abilities are pertinent to activities in which they are engaged with students. Because BTs have limited classroom experience, any success or failure can have a dramatic effect on self-efficacy beliefs.

Teacher self-efficacy is most pliant in the first years in the classroom (Klassen & Chiu, 2010) and may become more fixed as teachers gain experience throughout their careers (Bandura, 1997). Swan et al. (2011) found that BTs' self-efficacy beliefs were highest at the conclusion of the student teaching experience and lowest at the end of the first year of teaching. This belief could possibly be due to the absence of the support of a cooperating teacher and can indicate that such aid is a critical factor in fostering self-efficacy beliefs among BTs. New teachers often struggle with aspects of classroom management, a lack of guidance in making curricular decisions, and finding their place among more experienced colleagues (Goodwin, 2012). Support from a principal or assistant principal in the form of strategic mentoring; common planning and collaboration opportunities; ongoing, two-way communication; and targeted professional development can bolster waning self-efficacy beliefs and better meet the specific needs of BTs (DuFour et al., 2016; Goodwin, 2012).

A teacher's level of personal efficacy is closely related to resilience and persistence – two factors that influence a BT's willingness to remain in a particular school or in the teaching profession (Yost, 2006). These findings reinforce the importance of the involvement of a supportive principal in the BT induction process to mitigate the loss of self-efficacy among first-year teachers and decrease BT attrition. Swan et al. (2011) also indicated that self-efficacy increased from the first to the second year of teaching which suggests that those who remain in the classroom and are presented with additional opportunities for mastery experiences gain confidence in their own abilities to perform the functions of a teacher. Bandura (1997) asserted that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy were more likely to emphasize academic activities during their classroom time and assert greater confidence in their students' abilities,

thereby fostering mastery experiences for their students as a result of their own confidence in their practices.

Self-efficacy beliefs are closely linked to job satisfaction (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Zakariya, 2020) and job performance (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Teachers who experience higher rates of job-related stress, particularly around classroom management and instructional strategies, reported less self-efficacy and lower levels of job satisfaction. Studies demonstrate that teachers with strong self-efficacy experience greater job satisfaction (Edinger & Edinger, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Zakariya, 2020), and teachers with strong self-efficacy are less likely to experience burnout (Molero Jurado et al., 2019; Zakariya, 2020). This information is particularly pertinent for BTs: those with the least experience, lowest rates of classroom effectiveness, lowest rates of self-efficacy, and greatest risk of attrition. By fostering BTs' self-efficacy beliefs, principals and assistant principals can improve job satisfaction and mitigate the effects of stress, ostensibly lowering the risk that BTs will leave their school or the profession altogether.

Künsting et al. (2016) identified three areas related to instructional quality that are influenced by teacher self-efficacy: supportive classroom climate, effective classroom management, and cognitive activation. Each of these is critical for students' learning progress. Teachers with stronger personal efficacy are less likely to feel apprehension or fear in delivering instruction to their students and are more open to attempting new instructional strategies or utilizing new instructional materials to meet their students' needs more effectively – thus building a more supportive classroom environment. Teachers who are more confident in their ability to manage a classroom effectively experience fewer disruptions and behavior issues with their students, thus allowing them to maximize the time spent on academic instruction. When

less time must be spent correcting negative student behaviors, teachers are more likely to praise their students' achievements and interact more positively with students, and in turn, promoting students' own senses of self-efficacy through social persuasion (Bandura, 1997; Künsting et al., 2016).

Teacher self-efficacy is also linked to a willingness to take risks and implement innovative techniques in the classroom (Künsting et al., 2016; Zakariya, 2020). As demonstrated in Figure 2, teachers who have a stronger belief in their own instructional abilities are more likely to persist in their efforts to educate students and are more likely to focus on academic tasks during class. They begin to believe that those efforts can make a difference in their students' success (Bandura, 1997). This greater emphasis on academic attainment leads to greater teacher effectiveness and an increase in students' academic progress as, according to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy beliefs have a generative capability where success begets further success.

Figure 2

Effect of Self-Efficacy on Beginning Teachers

Teacher Effectiveness

The classroom teacher has a more significant influence on student achievement than any other factor, including class size, per-pupil spending, teacher salaries, student-to-teacher ratios, student backgrounds, or socioeconomic status (Abitabile, 2020; Akram, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Slater et al., 2012; Stronge et al., 2011). A study by Slater et al. (2012) demonstrated the importance of the teacher in improving student learning, indicating that teachers who are one standard deviation better instructors than their colleagues, as measured by their students' performance on standardized assessments, have the potential to raise student test scores by as much as 27% of a standard deviation. Stronge (2018) asserted that teacher effectiveness can affect a students' success later in life, as well. Students who are taught by a highly effective teacher are more likely to enter college, live in a better community, and plan for retirement than their counterparts who have a less effective teacher. Chetty et al. (2014) found that students who are taught in a single grade by a teacher who is one standard deviation more effective than their colleagues can expect to earn 1.3% more over their lifetime. Therefore, schools and classrooms must be staffed with teachers who have the knowledge and skills to affect student learning positively.

However, academic achievement for students of first-year teachers is often significantly lower than that of those students who are assigned to more experienced teachers – even less than instructors who are in their second or third year in the classroom (Rivkin et al., 2005). Canales and Maldonado (2018) found that student gains increased from 0.21 to 0.33 standard deviations as teachers gain greater experience and become more effective in their first 10 years in the classroom. With a turnover rate near 10% for teachers after their first year, many new teachers never reach a level of effectiveness that allows their students to achieve at higher levels

(Abitabile, 2020). As teacher effectiveness increases at the greatest rate in the first few years of teaching, it is critical that beginning teachers remain in the profession long enough to gain experience and improve effectiveness (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Stronge et al. (2011) identified four dimensions of teacher effectiveness that relate to both teaching practice and the learning environment:

- instructional delivery, which provides a connection between the student and the curriculum at hand and includes differentiation, instructional complexity, expectations for student learning, and questioning;
- student assessment, including formal and informal components conducted for the purposes of formative and summative data collection;
- learning environment, which is dependent upon classroom management and organizational components combined with a positive climate and clear expectations for behavior; and
- personal qualities of the teacher, including the ability to build strong, positive relationships with students, a sense of fairness and respect for students, and an enthusiasm for learning.

This study found that more effective teachers, or those whose student performance ranked in the top-quartile, scored significantly higher in the dimensions of *learning environment*, with a focus around classroom management and organization, and *personal qualities*, specifically fairness and respect for students and building positive relationships. If teacher effectiveness is related to stronger practices in managing the learning environment and building positive relationships with students, this is an area in which principal suggestions may affect teacher behaviors positively

(Sehgal et al., 2017), particularly among BTs who are still developing the practices they may employ for years to come.

Effective teachers demonstrate competence in a variety of instructional realms, including both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Akram, 2019; Kleickmann et al., 2013). Each of these areas is improved across time through the individual teacher's own K-12 learning experiences, participation in a pre-service teacher education program, and personal teaching experiences in a classroom (Kleickmann et al., 2013). However, most BTs have limited on-the-job learning which may hinder their short-term effectiveness (Henry et al., 2011).

Teachers in effective schools also utilize a number of assessment and monitoring strategies to improve student achievement including frequent measurement of student academic progress by a variety of methods and utilizing those results to inform instruction and reteaching (Miller & Efaw, 2010). These methods allow teachers to improve the effectiveness of their instruction by examining individual student mastery and designing instruction tailored to those specific needs. While BTs may have knowledge of a variety of assessment methods and may even be familiar with the best methods of implementation, they frequently lack the experience of practice to make instructional adjustments based on the analysis of that data – one of the areas with the greatest result for a teacher's effectiveness (Miller & Efaw, 2010; Stronge et al., 2011).

Teacher effectiveness can be improved through a variety of means including collaboration with veteran teachers in a professional learning community and targeted professional development (Miller & Efaw, 2010; Mulyani et al., 2020; Sehgal et al., 2017). Both of these areas present challenges for teachers in terms of finding the time to collaborate and the time and funding to attend quality professional development offerings that increase both teacher effectiveness and, consequently, self-efficacy (Sehgal et al., 2017). The leadership of an effective

principal is critical to providing the support and funding for both in order to improve the quality of teaching performance and the overall capacity of a school to offer its students an excellent educational experience. If one of the principal's most significant responsibilities as an educational leader is to guide teacher development (Holland, 2009), then the duty to recruit, develop, and retain effective teachers is paramount as "the common denominator in school improvement and student success is the teacher" (Stronge et al., 2011, p. 355).

BT Induction Programs

Induction programs are among the most common methods used to provide BTs with the necessary supports to become skilled classroom practitioners, increase their effectiveness, and improve their retention (Ingersoll, 2012). Wong (2004) defines induction as:

> A system-wide, coherent comprehensive training and support process that continues for two to three years and then seamlessly becomes part of the lifelong professional development program of the district to keep new teachers teaching and improving toward increasing their effectiveness. (p. 42)

The ultimate goal of an induction program is to establish and build upon the professionalism of BTs (Jonson, 2008). The purpose of these programs is to bolster skills imparted during pre-service education coursework and enable BTs to overcome the challenges they face during their initial years in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2012; Koehler & Kim, 2012). Carroll (2007) found four defining principles to be the basis of a comprehensive induction program. These principles consist of deepening the BT's educational knowledge, initiating BTs into the larger school community, supporting the constant improvement of the school as a whole, and encouraging professional discussions centered around the goals and values of the community.

Carroll (2007) also found that the most effective induction programs offered participants a "package of support systems" (p. 7) that build on each other to offer BTs comprehensive assistance. Most frequently, these programs include supports such as:

- an initial orientation seminar that engages BTs in the culture of the school and district;
- regular, open communication with members of school leadership, often the principal or department chair;
- an assigned mentor teacher to provide guidance for surmounting obstacles;
- professional development designed around identified or perceived needs for BTs; and
- common planning or collaborative time with colleagues (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Ingersoll, 2012).

While there is a connection between participation in induction programs and BT retention, Ingersoll (2012) found that the types and number of supports available for BTs influenced the strength of that connection. The supports with the greatest effect on BT retention were having a mentor teacher from a common content area and having common planning time with colleagues in the same content area (Ingersoll, 2012; Qian et al., 2013). The most effective BT induction programs are highly-structured with a comprehensive implementation that involves an emphasis on sustained, long-term professional development and a foundation in collaborative practices (Wong et al., 2005). A strong BT induction program that provides multi-faceted, consistent supports can not only improve retention but also increase BTs' self-efficacy beliefs and decrease the level of stress they report (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2013).

An organization needs a unified vision that identifies its fundamental purpose and inspires a shared commitment to achievement from the staff (DuFour et al., 2016). The utilization of an orientation session at the school and district levels can help to introduce BTs to

the collective vision for educating students, effectively assimilate them into the larger culture, and, as a result, increase their job satisfaction and the likelihood of retention (Kearney, 2014; Totaro & Wise, 2018). While many schools host an orientation session for all staff members at the start of each new school year, Lunenburg (2011) recommended that BTs attend both the schoolwide orientation and one designed specifically to address their needs and to socialize them to the larger school culture. This process can provide BTs with the additional supports they need to feel welcomed and invested in their school.

The accessibility of avenues of communication between BTs and those in leadership positions is another important aspect of the induction process. Research indicates that consistent, two-way communication between BTs and school leaders, whether the principal, another administrator, or a department chair, improves retention (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Ingersoll, 2012). Ingersoll (2012) found that regular communication with school leaders was the most readily-available BT induction activity offered according to 87% of first-year teachers. This consistent communication also considerably reduced the attrition rate for BTs (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). BTs who reported that they received supportive communication from their school leaders, particularly addressing both the formal and informal protocols of their school (Buchanan et al., 2013), were significantly less likely to transfer between schools or to leave the teaching profession altogether, even across an extended period of time (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) define mentoring as "the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers" (p. 203). According to Jonson (2008), "mentors are the most important feature of a high-quality induction program" (p. 82). Although the quality and content of mentoring programs differ across schools and districts, the combination of an assigned

mentor and supportive communication with school leaders is the most common element of induction programs. Quality mentoring programs carry some of the largest implications of all identified BT supports and can result in greater job satisfaction and lower attrition for BTs (Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Commonly, formal mentoring occurs outside the classroom and away from the practical implementation of instructional practices (Koehler & Kim, 2012). The resulting disconnect can be alleviated by encouraging BTs and mentors to observe one another or colleagues during classroom instruction (Jonson, 2008). Whitaker et al. (2019) encourage resource allocations that allow BTs and mentors to visit one another's classrooms to build their professional relationship and offer the BT an opportunity to learn from an experienced educator.

Mentoring programs that focus on assisting BTs with both personal and professional needs are often the most successful as they emphasize growth within and outside the classroom (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Mentors are frequently the first resource for BTs when attempting to address personal needs, such as stress management and inclusion in the school culture, and professional needs that include specific advice around high-quality curriculum and instruction. While they remain the most common, one-on-one mentoring programs in isolation do not provide sufficient assistance for new teachers and should be combined with other elements for comprehensive support (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

A potential mentor's knowledge base and professional skill level should also be considered in the assignment process as the presence of a mentor alone may not provide sufficient support for a BT (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Whitaker (2020) cautions principals that for many BTs, the assignment of a mentor can signal latent approval for the BT to emulate the

skills and behaviors of the mentor. Because this relationship can have such a dramatic effect on the BT's current and future practice and professionalism, rather than selecting a mentor for convenience, the assignment must be made with careful consideration for the development of the BT and, subsequently, the larger effects on the students and school as a whole.

In their first years in the classroom, BTs must make the transition from students of education to classroom teachers; this transition requires the acquisition of new pedagogical skills, professional expertise, and knowledge about their workplace dynamic (McKeon & Harrison, 2010). BT induction programs often address these deficits through the implementation of quality, targeted professional development that can decrease stress and improve self-efficacy beliefs for BTs (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2013). Targeted PD is one of the induction components that contributes most to meeting the professional needs of BTs (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Ende (2021) finds that in order for teachers to retain and implement PD, it must meet a number of qualifications: it must be meaningful, engaging, and inclusive of teacher voice and choice and be respectful of teacher time. This is particularly true for BTs who often need support with developing their instructional skills but may not have the opportunity for significant input in selecting which PD is offered or attended (Dabbs, 2018).

According to Wilson (2011), the design and implementation of a high-quality PD program is one of the most critical ways to improve teacher quality and one with the potential for a high return on investment. BTs in different grade levels or content areas may express varying PD needs (Thomas et al., 2019), but some areas, such as classroom management and curriculum, are consistently identified as areas of growth (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Garwood & Harris, 2020). PD sessions also serve to build new teachers' shared understanding around instructional and curricular expectations (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Karlberg and Bezzina (2020) found

that effective PD programs are content-focused, include opportunities for active learning, are consistent with the school's mission and the needs of its students, are revisited throughout the school year – not just offered once and forgotten, and include a heterogeneous group of teachers from across the school to build community. Although BTs often report that PD is valuable for their professional growth, it can conflict with their other teaching responsibilities and cause additional stress (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). It is important for principals and assistant principals to be cognizant of this potential struggle and work to increase the efficiency and applicability of PD offerings as part of the BT induction program.

Isolation is a frequently-cited source of frustration for BTs who desire to work in a collegial environment that allows them to have a positive influence on their students (Wong et al., 2005). A lack of cooperation and support from colleagues can contribute to decreased self-efficacy and increased attrition among BTs (Buchanan et al., 2013; Helms-Lorenz et al., 2013). While the assignment of a qualified mentor can help to alleviate some of the feelings of isolation and foster collaboration, the mentor alone is not sufficient to assimilate a BT into the larger school culture (Jonson, 2008). Incorporating elements of collaborative practice with more experienced colleagues into the BT induction program can reduce that sense of isolation and lead to the development of greater classroom effectiveness as BTs learn from and interface with veteran teachers (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). It is critical that BTs make early associations with a range of more positive and constructive staff members while their initial outlook on the school and profession is formed (Whitaker, 2020). These associations can be intentionally fostered to help BTs feel more welcomed and supported as they begin to grow and develop professionally (Whitaker et al., 2019).

Two of the most common elements of BT induction programs, an assigned mentor from a common curricular area and common planning time with other teachers in the same subject area, are also among the strongest factors associated with BT attrition as they build multiple points of connection between BTs and their colleagues (Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Qian et al., 2013). While formal mentoring is the prevailing support provided to BTs, the informal associations and communications between the BT and other co-workers that occur during shared planning opportunities or in casual conversation may be some of the easiest and most valuable contacts for inexperienced teachers (Jonson, 2008). These unstructured interactions with veteran teachers can provide BTs with a variety of supports for the myriad challenges they face such as understanding school policies, dealing with classroom discipline issues, making parent contacts, and planning effective lessons.

BT Induction in North Carolina

In North Carolina, legislative statute and State Board of Education (SBOE) policy dictate that each local educational agency (LEA) develop a Beginning Teacher Support Program (BTSP) plan and submit that plan for approval to both the local school board and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). According to this policy, "the primary and direct goal of the BTSP is to help new teachers improve skills and build confidence to become successful educators" (Section II, par. 1), and LEAs must include certain components in their BT induction program that are deemed essential by the SBOE.

An LEA's BT induction plan must include an orientation session offered within the first two weeks of the BT's first day of work (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). This orientation must offer information about the school system's policies and procedures, available

professional development (PD) opportunities, the evaluation process, and any locally-provided curriculum supports. LEAs are also required to inform BTs of guidelines for their working conditions including limited preparations and duties and no assigned extracurricular activities unless specifically requested in writing by the BT. This orientation session informs new teachers about the expectations and supports available for them and serves as an introduction to the culture of the school and district (Totaro & Wise, 2018).

All BTSPs in North Carolina are required to include systems for assigning a highly-qualified mentor for each BT for their first three years in the classroom (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). A mentor's status as highly-qualified is determined by their rating on their most recent summative evaluation with a rating of "proficient" as the minimum requirement and priority given to those potential mentors who were rated as either "accomplished" or "distinguished." Mentors receive training based on the North Carolina Mentor Standards to advance their skills as a teacher-leader and are provided continuing assistance as they work to support and encourage their assigned BT.

Each LEA's BTSP must also include opportunities for goal setting and guided improvement for BTs (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). As part of the evaluation process, BTs collaborate with their mentor and principal (or principal's designee) to identify areas of growth and write targeted goals in their professional development plan (PDP) to address those needs. These PDP goals are revisited and discussed periodically throughout the year to assess progress toward their accomplishment which is an important step that encourages BTs to become self-reflective and grow in their professional practice (Thompson, 2018). BTs are provided four full (45-minute) classroom observations each year followed by timely post-conferences to discuss strengths and opportunities for improvement (North Carolina State Board

of Education, 2020a). BTSPs must also include opportunities for professional development to foster their professional growth further.

BT Induction in Mountain County Schools

While each LEA's BTSP must include these elements, the logistics for designing and implementing the plan are left to each LEA's discretion. The BTSP in Mountain County Schools (MCS) addresses all of these aspects and offers some additional supports for BTs in the district. Many of these components, including orientation and specific PD offerings, focus on initiating BTs in the district culture and building their capacity as educators.

In MCS, all new district employees, including BTs, participate in an orientation session held at the beginning of the school year. If new employees are hired after the school year begins, they are provided with a shortened orientation as needed and may attend the full session at the beginning of the following school year. For BTs, the initial orientation session lasts for 3 days and is centered around initiating BTs into the district's culture and environment with an emphasis on specific aspects of the BTSP, expectations for new employees, and supports offered for BTs. Because the district covers considerable land area and encompasses a range of schools and communities from extremely rural to more urban, different portions of the orientation session are offered at schools throughout the community to encourage BTs to view the school system as a cohesive unit.

During the orientation session district leadership and community partners, including coaches from the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NC NTSP), review all aspects required by SBOE policy and others that are deemed beneficial. The district's director of the BT program reviews all aspects of the BTSP, and district curriculum leaders discuss available curriculum supports and resources available to BTs to help them implement their state-mandated

curriculum effectively. The superintendent of schools leads a session called "The Mountain Way" to introduce BTs to the district's culture and values officially. Members of the human resources department review a range of topics including the requirements of a Professional Educator's Initial License, the optional benefits packages available for district employees, advice for making sound financial decisions, and instruction on interpreting and understanding paychecks. Other leaders present on local BOE policies and district initiatives such as the implementation of the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for students and expansion of the professional learning community (PLC) culture. Although the district is large and varied, many new employees who are not local to the area are unfamiliar with more than its moderately-sized urban area which hosts an ever-growing university. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, BTs and other new employees were also treated to a bus tour of the county in an effort to provide them with a larger scope of reference in caring for their students and understanding the diversity of experience that their students likely bring to the classroom setting.

Although SBOE policy allows for retired educators to serve as mentors for BTs (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a), MCS makes a determined effort to ensure that assigned mentors for all BTs are current, practicing educators. Mentors are appointed through a partnership between district office staff and the school principal or assistant principal and are intended to serve in this capacity for the duration of the BT's participation in the BTSP. In order to be considered for a mentor position, veteran teachers must complete district-led training that reviews all aspects and requirements of the BTSP. This training must be completed once and does not require follow-up sessions. However, the district director recently implemented optional mentor support sessions to provide scaffolded assistance for any mentors who may have questions or wish to engage in discourse with their colleagues; the director also plans to

implement a book study with future mentors using Jonson's *Being an Effective Mentor: How to Help Beginning Teachers Succeed* (2008). As compensation for the additional responsibilities inherent in such a leadership role, mentors are provided with a monthly stipend for the duration of their active service.

In their work with BTs, mentors engage in a number of activities intended to develop their BT partner while building their leadership capacity. They are encouraged to support BTs actively in setting and developing their PDP goals and are sometimes involved in the BT's PDP conferences with the principal or assistant principal. Mentors are also invited to serve as peer observers to gain greater exposure to quality techniques or strategies that they can share with their mentee; however, by district policy, mentors are never assigned as peer observers for their assigned mentee in an effort to preserve their non-evaluative relationship. BTs and mentors are provided with a prescribed list of questions and talking points and are asked to visit them at intervals throughout the school year. These questions cover a wide range of topics intended to ensure that mentor/mentee conversations are productive and provide BTs with a broad impression of the teaching profession. Documentation of these conversations also serves as a measure of accountability when justifying the stipend provided to mentors.

SBOE policy requires districts to provide PD for BTs but does not dictate the content and scope of those offerings (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). As a district, MCS offers a wide range of specially-designed options to help support BTs' growth. These sessions are most frequently led by district office leadership, currently-assigned mentors, and coaches with the NC NTSP. Principals have infrequently led offerings in the past but have not recently been directly involved in the process. Targeted PD opportunities for BTs are often focused on basic pedagogy and research-based best practices; common topics include lesson planning and

classroom management, among others. However, the sessions are adjusted annually based on the specific needs and situations of current BTs, feedback from the previous year, and data collected from the North Carolina TWCS. In previous years, the district has planned for a gradual reduction in the number of required PD sessions for BTs, reasoning that there is a greater need for support in the first year than in subsequent years.

MCS provides its BTs with a variety of curriculum supports throughout their initial years in education. The district curriculum and coaching team is comprised of three directors who lead curriculum for grades PreK-5, 6-8, and 9-12, and two instructional coaches who work with grades PreK-8 and 9-12. This team collaborates to implement new instructional initiatives from both the state and district levels and disseminate that information to BTs via PD offerings. Additionally, most BTs in grades PreK-8 are assigned instructional coaches through the NC NTSP; the single high school in the district employs an on-site instructional coach who works with its BTs. The evaluation process is another aspect of the BTSP dictated by SBOE policy and implemented by MCS. The human resources director works closely with individual principals to ensure that BTs are placed in the correct evaluation cycle and receive the required number of annual observations conducted by the appropriate school leader. Mentors are also consulted in the evaluation process to ensure that they have access to their mentee's PDP and that BTs are accurately placed in the correct evaluation cycle.

Teacher Attrition

Nationally, teacher attrition is a costly challenge for school districts and the students they serve, and public schools in the United States are estimated to need an additional 200,000 teachers by 2025 due to increases in enrollment, initiatives to lower class sizes, and large numbers of teacher retirements (Harris, 2015). For a number of years, districts have struggled to

fill vacant positions in critical areas such as math, science, special education, and world languages (Associated Press, 2021). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already difficult situation. A shortage of available certified staff and substitutes has led many schools to ask teachers to take on additional responsibilities such as covering classes during their planning time and instructing larger groups of students which can lead to increased exhaustion and burnout. Bastian and Fuller (2021) found that while the majority of teachers are not *currently* leaving the profession at elevated rates, the attrition rate for veteran teachers has increased over the last few years and leaves a larger number of less experienced teachers in the classroom. In looking to the future, nearly one third of respondents in a recent survey by the National Education Association reported that they have plans to leave the teaching profession earlier than they had intended (Walker, 2021). Among new teachers (those with less than six years of experience), the self-forecasted attrition rate was greater than one in four, meaning that as more experienced teachers anticipate exiting the profession in the near future, newer teachers are declining to remain long enough to gain the experience that will make them more effective classroom educators.

The lack of administrator support is one of the top five most frequently cited reasons for teachers who leave education, and teachers' *perceptions* of their principals' effectiveness can have a dramatic effect on long-term retention in a school and district (Abitabile, 2020). Other causes of teacher attrition include lower salaries than jobs that require similar education levels, increased pressure due to federal and state accountability legislation that emphasizes standardized testing, and challenging working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Harris, 2015). Teachers who seek certification through alternative pathways are also much more likely to leave the profession. Some pre-service teachers also report that they choose never

to enter the classroom due to a lack of respect for the profession and the noticeable absence of empowerment for teachers (Abitabile, 2020; Harris, 2015).

North Carolina's teacher attrition rate for 2020-2021 was 8.2% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022) – slightly higher than the national average of 8% (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). For 2019-2020 the attrition rate for BTs in North Carolina was 11.7% which was substantially greater than for experienced teachers (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020b) and slightly higher than the BT attrition rate in 2018-2019 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020). In North Carolina LEAs are provided with 23 different reasons that can be used to code attrition data (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021). The reason code most frequently cited by teachers for leaving their position was personal reasons at just under 60%, and 13.7% of teacher resignations were due to a career change. It is notable that the reason codes do not provide an opportunity for further clarification, but the code "dissatisfied with teaching" was used 11.4% more frequently in 2019-2020 than in 2018-2019.

Within MCS the teacher attrition rate for the 2019-2020 school year was 13%. Based on data from the North Carolina TWCS, the percentage of teachers who plan to continue teaching in MCS remained relatively consistent and nearly ten percentage points higher than the state average from 2018 to 2020 (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2018; North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2020). Teachers also persistently responded that the factor most closely associated with their desire to remain at their individual school was their school leadership. With specific regard to BTs, over three-fourths of new teachers reported that the support they received from their school and MCS had been important in their decision to remain at their current school.

Principal Support

Abitabile (2020) found that specific leadership practices by a school principal, including visibility, honesty, approachability, and encouragement, can have a significant effect on a teacher's decision to remain in their school or district. A lack of principal support is often cited as one of the primary reasons teachers leave the profession – more important than even salary or teacher workload (Abitabile, 2020; Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Conversely, a highly-effective principal who encourages their teachers can be a major factor in recruiting, developing, and retaining excellent educators. Principals who exhibit strong leadership practices and who encourage and foster teacher collaboration can also improve teacher self-efficacy (Sehgal et al., 2017). Leadership qualities have a strong connection to job satisfaction which is closely linked to self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Sadeghi et al., 2021; Sehgal et al., 2017; Zakariya, 2020), and as the formal educational authority within a school, the principal's leadership behaviors are key to the success of their teachers and students (Mulyani et al., 2020).

Throughout the 20th century, the role of the school principal was transformed from one focused on management to one that emphasizes the principal as the instructional and cultural leader (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Holland, 2009). Modern principals are responsible for blending human capital development, instructional support, and organizational management to build a strong positive school culture that fosters the growth of both students and teachers (Donaldson, 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Habegger, 2008; Learning Policy Institute, 2017). As such, the importance of trust as an underlying component of the strong interpersonal relationships required to build such a culture cannot be understated (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019). A strong positive relationship between a teacher and a principal requires a level of trust and the assurance for

teachers that they have their principal's support. Without this trust, teacher effectiveness in the classroom may be stifled, and basic instructional processes such as observations may become less effective, at best, or confrontational, at worst.

Although a principal's effect on student achievement is often indirect, the principal's involvement in the management of a school and the shaping of the conditions under which learning occurs should not be minimized as it has the potential to affect *all* students and teachers within the school environment (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Donaldson, 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Kurt et al., 2012; Liu & Hallinger, 2018). In fact, the principal's influence on learning, while indirect, is second only to that of the teacher in terms of student achievement (Donaldson, 2013). The combination of principal leadership and teachers' strong instructional quality have a positive and significant influence on school effectiveness, and teaching performance has been shown to be enhanced through quality leadership from the principal (Mulyani et al., 2020). Improved student growth, and its associated teacher effectiveness, are increasingly an expectation of principals as a condition of employment (Donaldson, 2013), and teacher efficacy has a bearing on both (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Principals have the capacity to influence individual and collective efficacy dramatically among their teachers while acting as both principal-teachers and institutional administrators.

Teacher self-efficacy is directly linked to classroom effectiveness and student achievement (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Sehgal et al., 2017), and teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and student performance share reciprocal causality (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Principal self-efficacy and leadership behaviors also influence both individual and collective efficacy as well as student performance (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). Effective principals exhibit a number of leadership practices that foster the growth of efficacy which includes creating and

implementing a school vision, setting bold but achievable goals, nurturing a positive school culture, encouraging collaboration and shared leadership, and focusing on high-quality instructional practices (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Liu & Hallinger, 2018). These practices must exist in conjunction with the administrative duties that must be carried out in order to maintain the school as a functioning unit (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). It is the responsibility of the principal to nurture an environment in which Bandura's (2012) sources of self-efficacy (see Figure 1) are readily found and experienced.

While fostering efficacy among teachers, the principal is also responsible for developing the human capital of their staff and seeking out ways to improve teacher effectiveness (Donaldson, 2013). Principals make hiring decisions, assign teachers' class schedules, implement plans for staff PD, and determine how best to retain effective teachers in their schools. Each of these determinations has significant implications for the instructional capacity of the school and subsequent student achievement. Hiring high-quality teachers is arguably one of the most important responsibilities of a school principal, often cited as one of the most frequently employed means of increasing teacher effectiveness (Donaldson, 2013; Whitaker, 2020). Principals who are knowledgeable of the qualities that make teachers effective and who consistently seek out and hire according to those characteristics lead schools with higher student growth (Grissom et al., 2021). These principals are aware of and actively cultivate their school's positive culture, and their hiring decisions are based on those collective values (Whitaker, 2020). Through strategic recruitment, employment, and retention efforts, principals' attention to human capital can reduce teacher attrition and bolster student learning (Grissom et al., 2021).

Effective principals make investments in the human capital of their employees through their instructional decisions. Leithwood (1992) found that the principal's role in developing

teachers is the most important function of an educational leader. School leaders must make careful decisions about which teachers are assigned to specific classes (Grissom et al., 2021). Too often, inexperienced or ineffective teachers are assigned to low-achieving, low-income, or minority students (Donaldson, 2013; Grissom et al., 2021) – a practice that does little to build efficacy for students or teachers and may lead to greater attrition for BTs. Strong principals make hiring and assignment decisions based on skill sets and previous preparation (Donaldson, 2013). After those determinations are made, principals also support their staff members' growth and self-efficacy by taking an active role in the implementation of quality instructional programming (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Donaldson, 2013; Grissom et al., 2021; Liu & Hallinger, 2018). These PD offerings may include instruction on effective teaching techniques, navigating conflict with students or parents, or understanding the cultural norms of the community, but principal support and involvement are critical to their successful implementation (Holland, 2009). Donaldson (2013) found that professional development was the most frequently used method of building human capital and increasing teacher effectiveness among a principal's staff and is the primary means by which principals can influence student learning (Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

DuFour et al. (2016) assert that culture exists in every school and is comprised of "the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm for a school and guide the work of the educators within it" (p. 22). Culture is the basis of a successful (or unsuccessful) school, and without a positive culture an institution may likely never reach its potential for achievement (Habegger, 2008). An environment of trust and mutual respect is essential for continued school improvement, progressive teacher development, and forms the foundation of a healthy school culture (Schneider, 2003). Furthermore, a supportive culture plays a crucial role in BTs' successful induction, job satisfaction, and, ultimately, retention (Bickmore & Bickmore,

2010; Buchanan et al., 2013; Sutcher et al., 2016). According to Goodwin (2019), BT retention is better predicted by organizational culture than student demographics or other factors.

The role of the principal in supporting teachers, particularly BTs, involves fostering a positive school culture. Principals' efforts to demonstrate and promote respect, equitability, and integrity are key to the foundation of trust upon which a positive school culture is built (Schneider, 2003). Habegger (2008) identified two significant activities in which principals can purposefully engage with students, teachers, parents, and community members to build a positive school culture: create a sense of belonging to the school by developing strong relationships and encouraging active participation, and provide clear direction through goal setting and transparent communication.

A large part of that responsibility to foster strong relationships within the school involves empowering teachers through engagement, participation in PD, improving self-efficacy, and providing autonomy (Balkar, 2015). The established social patterns of the organization influence the strategies principals use to empower their teachers and are dependent upon the relationships that exist within the building. As such, principals can build relationships among their staff members by promoting social activities that foster teamwork and a collective spirit. While the duties and responsibilities of a principal are never-ending and seem to compound constantly, culture-building underpins every other effort at improvement and must be undertaken deliberately and with concerted effort.

Pratt (1989) identified three stages of teacher development, beginning with the mastery of skills and expansion of early competence. BTs in this initial phase of their teaching career pursue knowledge and seek support as they work to become stronger practitioners. Principals are uniquely positioned to leverage their influence and expertise to support the development of BTs

in their schools. Principal involvement with BTs sets the standard for the rest of the staff and models the level of support expected for newly inducted staff members (VanderPyl, 2007). Research indicates that BTs want their principals to be involved in their development and are more likely to remain in the teaching profession if they feel welcomed and supported by their administrators (Abitabile, 2020; Berg, 2019; Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Harris, 2015; Holland, 2009; VanderPyl, 2007).

Visibility and proximity, honest feedback focused on strengths and areas for growth, authenticity, and encouragement are all specific behaviors that BTs seek from their principals (Abitabile, 2020). A study by Norman and Sherwood (2018) found that despite any anxiety they may feel about the observation process, BTs want their principals to be present in their classrooms and desire both celebrations and constructive criticisms as they work to grow as professionals. Approachability is also an intangible but highly consequential expectation of the school principal (Ruder, 2006). Although the responsibilities of the principal are seemingly endless, a commitment to approachability and visibility is critical for supporting teachers and students and for building trust. An open door and willingness to devote time to converse with staff members sends the message that the faculty are of the utmost importance, thus fostering a trusting relationship and positive school culture. Many BTs consider their principal to be as important in meeting their needs as their mentor and seek out their principal when meeting personal needs in areas such as competence, autonomy, and respect (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). By demonstrating their confidence in BTs' professionalism and instructional capabilities via social persuasion, principals also foster BTs' burgeoning sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012).

Chapter Summary

The effect of the classroom teacher on student learning cannot be overstated, and principal engagement is critical to recruiting and retaining highly-effective teachers. Strong BT induction programs that offer comprehensive support, including numerous components that fall under the purview of the principal, are more likely to increase BTs' self-efficacy beliefs, decrease their levels of stress, and improve the likelihood that they will remain in the profession. Through strategic interactions, principals can foster BTs' self-efficacy to promote resilience and persistence and, ultimately, minimize attrition and improve effectiveness through increased classroom experience.

Chapter 3. Methodology

New teacher attrition presents a significant problem for schools and districts across North Carolina and the United States. With an improving economy in 2022 and increased student enrollment, schools are ready to hire teachers to fill open positions. However, due to teacher attrition and a decline in enrollment in teacher preparation programs, districts are likely to face a shortage of over 100,000 teachers in the next five years (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teacher development, particularly with new teachers, is the most significant function of a principal's role as an educational leader (Holland, 2009; Whitaker, 2020). This study is designed to examine BTs' perceptions of the role of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction program and how those perceptions affect BT self-efficacy and retention.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction process influences both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of BTs. The overarching research question in this study is: How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence the BT's self-efficacy? To answer this question, the researcher also explored the following supporting sub-questions:

1. What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?
2. What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?
3. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?

4. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

Research Design

Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Via interviews as a means of data collection, qualitative research helps the researcher identify themes within the data and interpret the meaning of that information. Qualitative study is often used to explore a particular phenomenon to build a base of understanding for the topic (Creswell, 2009). Although research exists that highlights the importance of an induction process for BTs in their first year of teaching and the need for fostering self-efficacy among BTs, little analysis has been conducted specifically on the role of the principal or assistant principal in building BTs' self-efficacy during that process.

The researcher determined that as the best method for exploring the lived experiences of a small group of BTs during their BT induction process, phenomenology was the appropriate method for use. Phenomenological research is a type of qualitative inquiry that seeks to understand the firsthand knowledge of a small number of subjects who experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2009) – in this case, BTs who were part of a BT induction program in a specific school district. This phenomenological study will examine the perceptions of the lived experiences of eight BTs who have completed between one and three years as classroom teachers and will allow for exploring perceptions through the theming and coding of interview data.

Site Selection

The district evaluated in this study is located in the rural northwestern region of North Carolina. It consists of a single high school, eight primary schools that serve grades Pre-

Kindergarten-8, and one Kindergarten-8 charter school. Currently, the district serves over 4,875 students and employs approximately 425 certified staff with an average of 52 new hires district-wide each year. Overall teacher turnover reached a high of 17% in 2016 but has since fallen to 13% which is higher than the state average for North Carolina. This percentage includes teachers who left the district entirely, either for retirement or employment in another district or field, but does not include transfers between schools.

As part of the new teacher induction program, BTs are provided with a new teacher orientation; a mentor with experience in the BT's content area, when possible; on-site instructional coaching; and differentiated, high-quality professional development at both the school and district levels. For the 2021-2022 school year, nearly 8% of certified staff were classified as BTs with less than three years of classroom experience. On the 2020 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS), evaluations of the BT program in this district were highly favorable and indicated that the support provided was influential in the BT's decision to continue teaching in the same district the following year (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2020).

This study will focus on the eight schools in the district that serve students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th. A lead principal staffs each school, and the district employs four assistant principals to serve as additional support in the larger schools. Only one principal in the district is in their first three years as a lead administrator, and 33% of school principals in the district have completed an advanced degree (Ed.S. or Ed.D.). Based on data from the TWCS, nearly 90% of respondents district-wide agreed that school leadership provides consistent support for teachers, and 90% percent of staff felt that administrators and faculty enjoy a shared vision for the school and district – both higher than the state averages at 79% and 83%,

respectively (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2020). The staff strongly acknowledged that school leadership is focused on improving the support received by BTs, and 89% of respondents indicated that they enjoy regular communication with school leadership, including administration.

Population and Sample

The researcher used purposeful sampling to identify study participants who were most likely to have experienced the specified phenomenon and would best help understand the research problem (Creswell, 2009). The first criterion used for selection was employment within the district chosen as a site for study. The second criterion was the teacher's years of classroom experience; all participants needed to have at least 1 but no more than 2.5 years as a teacher. The final criterion for selection was that participants were engaged in the district's BT induction program at some point during those first years of experience. Some participants were currently involved in the induction program as second-year teachers, and some were in the first semester of their fourth year of teaching, having just completed participation in the induction program at the end of the previous school year. These selection requirements ensured that study participants had direct knowledge and experience with the district's BT induction program and were chosen in order to gain a better understanding of BT perceptions of the role of principals and assistant principals in the induction process.

The district to be studied employs 56 BTs in their first three years of teaching and 19 teachers in the first semester of their fourth year of teaching who are no longer identified as BTs. Of the currently employed teachers, the researcher identified 35 who met all of the criteria for participation.

Data Collection Strategies

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and East Tennessee State University (ETSU) to conduct the research. Upon IRB approval, the researcher contacted the Superintendent of Schools for the district to request his permission and support for the research study. After permission had been obtained, the researcher received a list from the district's human resources department of teachers who initially met the criteria for participation. These potential participants were contacted via email with a request to participate in the study. This request included a description of the study and the purpose of conducting the research. The researcher requested an interview with each participant who responded favorably to the request and then created a list of possible individuals who were willing to participate and met all designated criteria.

This research study used semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interview protocols were employed during the interview process to provide prompts for questions and serve as a means for collecting notes. The researcher also used Zoom conferencing and recording during the interview process with all participants, and interviews lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour, on average. The researcher obtained permission from all participants to record and transcribe the interview and downloaded a detailed transcript of each interview using the transcription feature in Zoom.

Data Analysis Strategies

Data from the interview process were transcribed and coded to identify commonalities among the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Transcription and analysis were on-going as subsequent interviews were conducted which allowed the researcher to reflect on the data continually and establish embedded themes (Creswell, 2009). Codes were emergent

and based on the data collected in this study; predetermined codes were not utilized. The researcher initially examined the interview transcripts line-by-line to identify significant statements through horizontalization and then coded for thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013).

After topic clusters were identified, interview transcripts were again reviewed for comparison and further categorization to develop an essence description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Emergent themes are reported in Chapter 4 and coupled with specific quotes gleaned from interviews to support those identified themes. Triangulation involves checking several sources of data against others and looking for patterns and consistency at multiple points (Creswell, 2013). Data in this study were triangulated using prior research on self-efficacy, interview transcripts and coding, and district data which includes the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Surveys for 2018 and 2020.

Assessment of Quality and Rigor

The researcher conducted all data collection and analysis and assessed it based on the four criteria for evaluating quality and rigor in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anfara et al., 2002). Creswell (2009) recommends the use of multiple strategies for ensuring the credibility of qualitative research. This study ensured credibility through triangulation, member checks, and peer review. The researcher completed triangulation to identify and justify themes using a variety of data sources including prior research on self-efficacy, the interview transcripts, thematic codes of this study, and other district data. This triangulation ensured the credibility and confirmability of the research.

Member checks were performed for all study participants which allowed each participant to review the themes and data analysis for accuracy via a follow-up interview (Creswell, 2009). This ensures that the data collected and the meaning gleaned from its analysis is an accurate and

complete representation of each participant's original meaning. The researcher also collaborated with another researcher to ensure intercoder agreement and asked the second researcher to check for agreement on the codes initially identified for particular passages within the transcripts (Creswell, 2009). The use of peer review of data, coding, and recoding ensured the dependability of the study's findings. The researcher also used purposeful sampling to ensure that participants met the specific criteria necessary for inclusion in the study as a means to gain a better understanding of the research problem and question and to ensure transferability (Creswell, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Because this research study will be conducted in a small, rural school district, ensuring anonymity could be problematic. The district employs 18 principals and assistant principals, and it will be necessary to code data to minimize the identification of specific individuals. Although there were initially 35 BTs who met the prescribed criteria, the limited number of participants who were actually interviewed could endanger the validity and reliability of research data. Additionally, because the study is specific to a single school district with a limited participant pool, applicability to larger or urban districts could be questioned. One method of alleviating these concerns is administering the study to a broader range of participants, possibly within the encompassing Regional Educational Service Alliance (RESA) which serves 13 local school districts and includes larger and more urban schools.

Chapter Summary

This study examined the relationship between principal and assistant principal involvement in the BT induction program and BTs' self-efficacy and retention by utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of a group of BTs in a rural school district

in northwestern North Carolina. Study participants had between one and four years of experience and had engaged in the district's BT induction program at some point during those years of experience. Data from the interviews was transcribed, coded, and analyzed using emergent coding to identify common themes among the responses. Credibility was ensured through the use of triangulation, member checks, and peer review.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this research was to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction process influences both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of BTs in a rural district in northwestern North Carolina. The researcher collected data regarding the perceptions of BTs through interviews, analyzed and coded the transcripts, and compared the results to previously-collected research and district data to answer the following overarching research question: How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy? To answer this question, the researcher also explored the following supporting sub-questions:

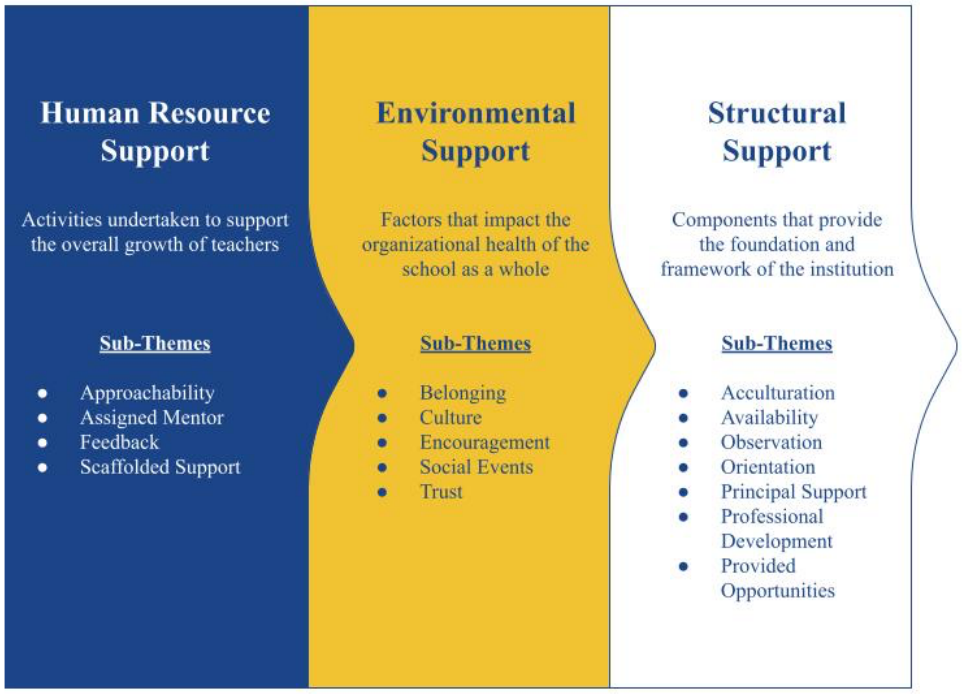
1. What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?
2. What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?
3. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?
4. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

In the course of this study, the researcher identified three themes that emerged from the participants' responses: (a) human resource support (the activities undertaken to support the overall growth of teachers), (b) environmental support (the factors that impact the organizational health of the school as a whole), and (c) structural support (the components that provide the foundation and framework of the institution) (see Figure 3). The researcher also identified 16 sub-themes that clarified the data: acculturation, approachability, assigned mentor, availability,

belonging, culture, encouragement, feedback, observation, orientation, principal support, professional development, provided opportunities, scaffolded support, social events, and trust.

Figure 3

Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes



Participants

There were eight participants involved in this study, all of whom were BTs in the same school district. All participants had 1-3.5 years of teaching experience, were teachers at four different schools, and served students in grades Pre-Kindergarten-8. One male and seven females participated in the interview process. Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the study's participants.

Table 1

Study Participants

Name	Gender	Years of Experience	Highest Degree Attained	Grade Span Taught
Alice	F	1	Bachelor's	Pre-K - 2
Bryan	M	3	Master's	Pre-K - 2
Caitlyn	F	3	Bachelor's	3-5
Danielle	F	2	Bachelor's	6-8
Kelly	F	2	Master's	3-5
Mary	F	2	Bachelor's	6-8
Samantha	F	1	Master's	Pre-K - 2
Sarah	F	2	Master's	Pre-K - 2

Interview Results

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with BTs who met the identified criteria. The researcher provided transcripts of the interviews to each participant to ensure accuracy, and participants were encouraged to provide clarification or any additional information for their responses. Responses were also compared to results from the North Carolina TWCS and peer-reviewed for veracity.

During data analysis, the researcher identified three overarching themes and their corresponding sub-themes related to principal and assistant principal support of BTs during the BT induction process: (1) human resource support which included approachability, assigned mentor, feedback, and scaffolded support; (2) environmental support which included belonging, culture, encouragement, social events, and trust; and (3) structural support which included acculturation, availability, observation, orientation, principal support, professional development,

and provided opportunities. None of the interview participants indicated that they perceived a difference in the supporting roles of the principal versus the assistant principal, and two of the participants, Kelly and Bryan, stated specifically that there was no discernible distinction.

Research Question

How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy?

After analyzing the responses to Research Question 1, the emergent theme of the participants' responses aligned with the need for environmental support (encouragement and trust) and human resource support (feedback). The identified sub-themes were confidence, efficacy-building, encouragement, and general support. BTs expressed the need for opportunities to foster their self-confidence. They also indicated that encouragement and support from their principals and assistant principals served to increase their self-efficacy beliefs.

Trust. The principal's trust in the BT played a significant role in the development of BT confidence and subsequent self-efficacy. Mary said:

> I know that when I feel more secure, I can help others feel more secure, and so when I know that I have the trust of my administration to facilitate learning in a classroom, then I am more confident in my abilities . . . That security piece, of knowing that I can trust my administration, has helped my competence in the classroom, and knowing that they're free for questions or anything like that has been phenomenal to boost not only my confidence but also my security in knowing that I'm in the right profession.

Similarly, Alice voiced that her principal's support of and trust in her developing classroom practices gave her additional confidence in her instruction. She said:

> [My principal's involvement] definitely makes me a lot more confident in the classroom, like a reminder that I know what I'm doing . . . It doesn't feel like he's looking over my shoulder like, "What's happening in [her class]?" [He] knows what's going on in here, and he supports it, and I'm doing fine, and I'm doing great. I think that, if anything, it definitely boosts my confidence . . . as a beginning teacher.

While principal support led to positive working conditions for some, conversely, Sarah stated that the lack of support from her principal had made her feel isolated and alone:

> It's been really hard, and it's made me feel pretty isolated and unsupported and definitely feel like I'm trying to figure it out on my own . . . I do feel supported from people in my building but not specifically supported from admin. It's made me feel pretty unconfident as a teacher.

Feedback. Several participants cited the importance of quality feedback and encouragement from the principal through the observation process. Bryan said:

> I think that it definitely built my self-efficacy. I think it may never be comfortable, having someone sitting in there, you know, watching you and knowing that, you know, that you're being observed, but I think the encouragement afterward, whether that be, "You know, I saw this, and this was great, or I saw this, maybe try this next time," and so it really became almost like a coaching session, as well.

Bryan also commented on how his principal's constructive feedback during observations communicated her interest in his growth as a teacher. Likewise, Kelly said:

> Anytime that I'm observed by her, she always tries to give me the positives and the pluses and minuses, like, "Here's what's working, let's talk about this, how can I help you with this?" Anytime that she's had those constructive criticisms, she's always offered

to be like, “You know what, let’s get in there. I’ll roll up my sleeves. I’m in there with you.”

Encouragement. Both Kelly and Caitlyn unknowingly referenced social persuasion, one of Bandura’s (2012) sources of self-efficacy, during their interviews. Kelly said:

> [My principal] always says that [my school], she only takes the best of the best, and anyone can say that, but whenever someone says that enough, you’re like, “Wow.” Sometimes, I think, “How did I get a job here, then?” But then again, sometimes, I’m like, “Wow, I got a job here. I must be the best of the best.” So, it’s little things like that, making me feel good and getting constructive criticism is a sign to me that “we want you to stay, we want you to be better, we want you to be here, we want you to be the best of the best.”

Caitlyn also referred to her principal’s communicated belief in her abilities as a significant source of self-efficacy for her as a BT.

Research Question Summary

In terms of fostering self-efficacy, BTs expressed the desire for both environmental and human resource support from their principal. BTs voiced the importance of the trust and encouragement of their principal in the development of their self-efficacy. The knowledge that their principal had confidence in their abilities as a classroom teacher directly bolstered their own belief in their ability to facilitate student learning. Principal feedback, both for areas of strength and growth, was also a significant factor in BTs’ self-efficacy beliefs and fostered the perception that the principal believed the teacher to be capable of improvement and success. The absence of principal support in these categories had a negative effect on BT self-efficacy.

Sub-Question 1

What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?

Participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the role of the principal in supporting BTs in the induction process; respondents identified two areas of greatest influence related to structural support (acculturation and availability) and three areas related to human resource support (approachability, feedback, and scaffolded support).

Acculturation. A number of participants expressed the conviction that a critical role of the principal in the BT induction process is the integration of the BT into the school culture. Alice recalled that her principal added her to the faculty email list as soon as she was hired which allowed her to get involved in school events as a newly hired BT. She said, "That communication at the beginning was pretty helpful." Sarah felt that the principal should help BTs become familiar with the expectations of the school and district, emphasizing the importance of:

> Walking the BTs through the school and county expectations, just as simple as, you know, getting everyone together for a staff meeting, introducing the BTs so that we know who's in our building, we know who we're working with, our co-workers.

Danielle felt that her principal's early efforts to orient her to the school's policies and procedures "made me feel very included in [my school] family right away."

Availability. Principal availability was also an important facet for interviewees. When asked what she felt was the role of the principal in supporting BTs, Mary said, "I would say, again, making themselves accessible and in a way that's not punitive, but in a way that's collaborative, and in the first three years, making sure that I know what I'm doing." Mary's

principal also shared her cellular phone number with Mary as soon as she was hired, giving her the sense that she was encouraged to contact her principal if she ever had a question or concern. Both Samantha and Caitlyn mentioned their principal's open-door policy and their feeling permitted to approach their principal with any question or need. Samantha related that at her "very first orientation, [the principal] made it very clear that she was an open door. I could come any time I needed her."

Approachability. BTs expressed the need for their principal to be not only available – but also approachable. Both Samantha and Mary used the term "sounding board" to describe their desire to be able to seek out advice from their principal and have open communication. Mary said, "I know that when something arises, if it be an issue or something really great, then I can go to them comfortably and say, 'here's what's going on,' and then they manage that." She also indicated that the ability to approach her principal with questions or concerns, "whether it be through just very brief conversations, passing through the hallway, or needing to send an email," was a significant role in principal support of BTs.

Alice shared that her principal is "always available," even coming to her classroom each day to provide her with bathroom breaks and filling in as a substitute for her. She said:

> He's so easy to talk to, and he's always in and out of the room, just to say 'Hi" and hanging out, not like doing observations or anything. He just wants to come and play with the kids for a little bit.

According to Bryan, it is important for the principal to listen to teachers:

> As a principal or an assistant principal, I do believe, yes, they have to be there to support the teacher all the time. It could be the . . . principal is there just to listen to the teacher . . . even sometimes to complain to, and then you know, they're there to say, "Okay, now go

> do your job. You said what you needed to say." And you know, I really respect that about my principal; she wants us to speak our mind, but then she also will say, "Okay, you know, I heard you, and now let's go do our job."

Samantha also expressed the effect of the principal's approachability on her self-efficacy in the classroom, saying that her principal's initial school-level orientation "helped because I felt like I had knowledge of what I should do if I ever ran into a problem . . . because she's very open and tells me if I ever need anything, please come."

Feedback. Several participants shared the significance of feedback provided by their principal and the accompanying instructional coaching that encouraged their professional growth. Mary said, "They are continually providing opportunities for me to grow as a professional." She also said:

> It's not a "here's what you need to do to definitely improve." It's an "okay, this is what's going well, and here are small steps to help you improve on that aspect and so an example of that would be . . ."

Bryan emphasized the importance of the principal as an instructional coach:

> In the sense of a BT induction program, principals should be and are the instructional coach. Some schools may have specific instructional coaches, but the principal and the assistant principal, I believe, are the head instructional coaches for all of the teachers, and I think that that goes down even to the beginning teachers. I think that kind of encompasses their role. Not only are they necessarily our bosses, but they want the best for us, as well, and then they take that instructional coach role on.

In conjunction with the need for feedback and coaching, both Mary and Kelly echoed the need for principals to be familiar with the strengths of the teachers in their building and have

sufficient knowledge to direct BTs to colleagues from whom they might observe and learn. Mary said:

> [If they notice] that I'm struggling with giving feedback during discussions, [they can say], "Okay, well, here's maybe someone in the building you can talk to about that," and so, providing and having that knowledge of the strengths of individuals around the school building. So then, as a BT, if I have questions, I know I can go to 1st grade to watch stations, but I need to go to 8th grade and to 5th grade to ask about vocabulary. Those are practical things for me to know.

Kelly referred to this relationship as a "bridge," saying that her administrators needed to be able to point her "to the person that they thought would be the best fit for me in that area."

Scaffolded Support. In sharing their perceptions of the role of the principal in supporting the BT induction process, multiple participants mentioned the need for a scaffolded approach to support for BTs throughout the duration of their time in the BT program. Sarah voiced her observation that BTs in their first year are likely to need more support than those in their second or third year:

> Obviously, a BT-1's going to not be as confident or sure of themselves as a BT-2, and they're going to have more questions. So, I think in the beginning, a principal needs to be more hands-on, kind of almost on stand-by for those questions . . . And then, as the BT-2 and -3, and as the teacher progresses in their career at that school, kind of letting off, letting them do their own thing. But I think there needs to be more observations in the beginning. Give positive, critical feedback of the BT, what they're doing, constructive criticism. There's always, of course, going to be things to work on, so I just think the principal needs to be present, more so in the beginning. And then, as you know, they get

older, I suppose, they can kind of give more things to the mentor, and it'd be a little bit more hands-off with that person.

Mary used analogies to describe her perception of the role of the principal in supporting BTs and the diminishing of that support over time:

> When I first started teaching, I was kind of in the amusement park of, like, who do I talk to if I get lost? Who am I finding? So, it was more of, I needed them as my lifeguards. But now, I see them more of, "Okay, we are in it together," and I know that they are at this point, and at this point, and if I get lost in the middle, I can find my way back out. Now, I see them as more of people I can collaborate with.

Caitlyn shared the scaffolded support provided by her principal and its influence on her growing confidence as a BT:

> If you have a problem or if there's something that she wants you to work on or anything at all, she doesn't ever just say, "Here's the solution, here, just do this." She gives you the confidence to go and take it on. She doesn't ever take our power away or you know, "I want you to say this and this." She gives you the confidence to go and take it on. She gives us the confidence to do it and suggestions or skills or puts us in touch with people to help.

Caitlyn also discussed how her principal "would model similar situations or ways that I could go about saying it, but with always, "These are my ideas, but you can handle it." Caitlyn conveyed that this approach gave her increased confidence that she could handle any situation.

Sub-Question 1 Summary. When sharing their perceptions of the role of the principal in the BT induction process, BTs identified both structural and human resource support as mechanisms of influence. Participants conveyed the need for their principal to facilitate their initiation into the

school culture, particularly through early and frequent communication that reviewed school policies and expectations. BTs also expressed the benefit of principal availability for answering questions, collaborating, and supporting development throughout the initial years in the classroom; however, multiple participants voiced the belief that this support should be more robust in the first year and steadily decrease as BTs gain more experience. Principal feedback and related coaching were other aspects that participants recognized as needs for BTs.

Sub-Question 2

What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?

In assessing the influence of the principal's involvement in the BT induction process on teacher retention, the researcher recognized four sub-themes that encompassed each of the themes identified in the data analysis. For human resource support, the specified sub-theme was the assigned mentor. Both belonging and culture were identified as sub-themes for environmental support, and for structural support the category of principal support was utilized. Throughout the interviews, several participants expressed that they were unaware of their principal's specific involvement in most aspects of the BT induction process including their mentor assignment. However, all participants voiced the importance of their assigned mentor in their success and decision to remain in the teaching profession.

Assigned Mentor. One of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the principal's role in the BT induction process was the selection of a strong mentor as a resource for BTs. Samantha said:

> My mentor is amazing, and she's happy to help me with any issues that I'm having. I mean, she goes out and looks for resources if she doesn't know how to help me, so that

> aspect of the BT program is phenomenal. It has made me really want to stay here and keep teaching.

Alice also spoke about the effect of her mentor pairing, asserting that she has the "best mentor ever," even though she was unaware of her principal's role in orchestrating the match. She also said:

> In terms of BT, the biggest thing I do at my school is with my mentor, and that's awesome. That's phenomenal . . . It was an immediate connection to someone . . . who I could talk to, and she and I have such a great relationship. She was definitely someone that I can go to and talk to.

Bryan and Danielle both shared that their mentor's close physical proximity within their school building had been very helpful, and both Kelly and Bryan shared that their mentors' years of experience and professional connections had helped them to integrate into the school community. All interview participants discussed the importance of their mentor in their desire to remain in the teaching profession. For participants who did not feel as supported by their principal, the importance of having a strong mentor in close proximity was even more pronounced.

Belonging. Participants shared that a sense of belonging in their school and district communities had a strong effect on their willingness to remain at their school long-term. Bryan said:

> I love the support from the overall district, and just how that trickles down, you know, to leadership in our schools, as well . . . My desire is to stay there and my desire is to stay in the profession. Our leadership is great. We have great leaders, and so it also, knowing that you have that support from your admin, you know, makes you want to stay, as well.

Mary also expressed that the culture of the school had affected her willingness to remain, saying:

> Oh, I just love it. I feel at home when I walk into my school building, knowing that not only are these people my colleagues, but I care about them as people outside of the building. It almost makes me teary to think about my school because it's just one of those where, this is so cliche, but it's like we really are family . . . I have felt valued as a person, and not just as someone else to get data. That's where I want to stay, at my school, because I do love who I work with, and I love the job that I have, and a lot of that is echoed throughout my administration and the county . . . It's not just a "me" thing, it's an "all of us together" thing.

Culture. The concept of the school "family" was mentioned by five of the eight participants as a factor in their intention to remain at their school. Caitlyn said, "I think that was a big part for me, of coming into a school like . . . that just feels so much like a family and just wanting to hit those milestones and be like those people." Caitlyn also shared that "it's that family environment that I feel just comes back to the way [my principal] leads." Mary expressed that "when I first got my job, I got a phone call from [the principal], saying, 'Would you like to be part of our school family?' and of course, I said yes." Bryan also stated that he plans to remain at his school, despite his long commute, because "just knowing that when you leave your house each morning and you're going to school with your other family that you spend a lot more time with a lot of times" is very meaningful for him. Each described the significant role that their principal plays in the development of that family environment, from the tone of emails to the constant reminders that "we are a big family," according to Bryan.

Mary also shared the effect of the school culture on her classroom and community which is a factor in her desire to remain at her school with her current principal. She said:

> I'm proud of my school. I'm proud of the kids that are there. I know my administration is, too. They say it, they live it, and that's the biggest thing. Both the assistant principal and principal don't just have empty words. They're lived out, and so that's where I see it in action. Then, I'm like, alright, we've got this. We can totally build some school culture because I know when we're doing it at school, and I can do it on a micro level in my classroom, then what we do in our classrooms can go out to homes and into the community.

A school culture that is not welcoming and encouraging had the opposite effect on BTs' intentions to remain at their school. Sarah said her principal's lack of involvement in the BT induction process has "changed me a lot. I definitely think that, you know, you always hear that in college and from people. 'Oh, admin's the number 1 thing.' I was like, 'Oh, whatever. It's for the kids, right?' But 100%, I mean, admin influences your day-to-day life. I mean, every day, you can't escape what your admin's expecting of you and what they want you to be doing." She explained, "Now I'm ready for a change because of the – directly because of the admin at my school."

Principal Support. Participants expressed that the steadiness and support of their principal and assistant principal in their interactions with BTs were also major factors in their retention. Danielle said, "while living in [. . .] County, I would love to stay at [my school]. I'm pretty biased, I guess, but I really think that they do a great job, and I really feel like they're some of the best principals in the county." She also indicated that, while she feels that her school and district provide high-quality support for her as a BT, she has considered leaving education. She indicated that "the problems that I have with the teaching profession are just with the state of North Carolina and not necessarily with our county."

Samantha said:

> I definitely want to stay at my school because of my principal. I really feel supported, and she really has that energy that reminds me that this is fun and we're here for the kids. It really, you know, I always say it, top down affects the culture, and she definitely does. It's a good culture, a great culture.

Similarly, Caitlyn also conveyed the impact of her principal's support on her decision to remain at her school and in teaching:

> She's very honest of her own struggles or, you know, challenges that are real, that our school is facing or herself personally, but she always comes back to our [school] family, we're going to get through it together. And that has made me want to stay, for the kids, for her, for just because I love teaching.

In terms of BT induction, Mary felt that the consistency and calm that was modeled by her principal and assistant principal helped her to be more successful as a teacher and desire to remain a teacher at her current school. She said:

> I feel like a broken record saying this, but it's so true. They're consistent, they're steady when everything else seems uncertain. Even though they may not feel like it, they show steadiness, they show stability, and so, seeing that echoed throughout our school has been really phenomenal in my eagerness to stay because it's one of those where it's being modeled for me in a way that is reproducible. I mean, if they can show that in all of the stuff that they have to deal with, then I can show that within my four walls. Their involvement, of being accessible, clear, consistent, and steady, has made the whole process not one of anxiety, but one of challenge.

Sub-Question 2 Summary. Perceptions of principal involvement in the BT induction process revealed several themes related to retention in human resource, environmental, and structural support. Participants indicated that, whether or not they realized the level of their principal's involvement in assigning their mentor, this was one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of principal involvement in the BT induction process that influenced attrition. All interviewees shared that their mentor had influenced their plans to remain in education. The principal's influence on fostering a sense of belonging and a positive school culture that welcomed BTs was also a factor in BT attrition, as was the ability of the principal to project calm and consistency in the face of any uncertainty faced by BTs.

Sub-Question 3

What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?

The effect of the BT induction process on the initiation into school culture was underlaid by one sub-theme from each of the thematic categories. From human resource support, the sub-theme of the assigned mentor was a critical facet of the cultural induction. As part of structural support the category of orientation was identified, and for environmental support the sub-theme of social events emerged. Participants asserted that their mentor's influence and connections within the school and community played a large role in their initiation into the school culture. They shared the importance of both the district- and school-level orientation opportunities but placed emphasis on the importance of the school-level session in integrating them into the school itself. BTs also indicated that the scheduled social events at both the school and district levels were important for networking and gaining a sense of the environment and their role in it.

Assigned Mentor. The participants revealed that their mentor served in some ways as a gateway into the school's culture. When asked which aspects of the BT induction program most helped to initiate her into the school culture, Samantha said, "The mentor program definitely because, through my mentor, I've learned a lot about the culture and also been introduced to all the other teachers and become a member of the family here through that."

Bryan also perceived his mentor as an integral part of his inclusion in the school community:

> I feel like [my mentor] is where I really kind of learned our school culture, through not only just being included in things at school but having a mentor that was able to explain why we do what we do.

While Kelly's mentor was not a similarly-assigned classroom teacher, her role as an EC teacher allowed Kelly to network with people with whom she might not normally have interacted:

> I definitely think the mentor thing is helpful. My mentor is not a classroom teacher; she's one of the EC teachers, and EC teachers know everybody. Having her as my mentor has definitely helped me get to know other people, and I think that definitely how mentors are chosen is strategic.

Alice felt that the age gap between her mentor and she was actually an advantage. She stated:

> There's a lot of us that are really young at [my school]. We have a really young school, and [my mentor] is in more of the middle-aged crowd. This sounds so weird to talk about, but that totally helped me bridge that gap with teachers of a different age who are in a different position in life . . . I think the mentor program is really great with that because it gets you connected with teachers of all ages and in different groups.

Orientation. While the district offers a comprehensive orientation session designed to introduce BTs and new employees to the district vision, the participants indicated that the separate school-level orientation and early interactions with school principals more directly affected their induction into the school culture. Mary said:

> I would just say as a whole, having beginning teacher induction start at a school level rather than a district level is important to me, as a person, because I know that my school is a day-to-day. I know I'm going to walk into that room every day like clockwork, whereas at a district level, that's going to be less frequent. So even though BTs at one school versus another, yes, we have the same requirements, our schools have different needs.

Bryan, reflecting on the importance of the role of the principal in incorporating BTs into the wider school culture, stated, "I do know that our principals took time to meet with beginning teachers, especially at the beginning of each year . . . and that helped move me into our school culture." Samantha also echoed the importance of the school-level orientation and the time spent with the principal, saying:

> I would say the specific orientation with my principal at the school where we got to really go over what's important to the school, what our mission is, all that stuff, and just in through that, getting to meet everyone here.

Social Events. School- or district-sponsored social events were the other category that BTs identified in helping them to engage in the school culture. Although most district-level gatherings were focused around professional development, the social aspect of those meetings helped BTs to network and feel a part of the larger culture; Bryan conveyed:

> We may have thought that all of the required trainings were crazy, but you know, there was a lot that I learned from that because it was good to meet with other beginning teachers, especially when [those trainings] were designed just for beginning teachers. And so, we were able to have some candid conversations about what was going on in our classrooms.

Kelly reflected that "the air of the school is that it's okay and it's good to be friends with the people you work with, [a philosophy] cultivated by the higher ups." She observed this ideology in practice at the social events enacted by her principal and assistant principal:

> [They] take time at the beginning of the year to make sure that the new teachers, even the beginning teachers and just new to [my school], get to know other people and introduce themselves to others and take time to have a little bit of a social event at the beginning of the year. We get the chance to get to know each other and meet the newer people, and I think that's definitely helpful.

Alice also mentioned the role of her principal in implementing social events that foster a positive school culture. She said, "I feel like honestly, that's one of the biggest roles [principals] have with teachers, is the environment that they create at their school." Alice reported that her principal organized events like painting the school gym, retirement parties, and baby and wedding showers, and worked with the school's parent organization to provide monthly duty-free potluck lunches in an effort to foster collegiality and a sense of community.

Sub-Question 3 Summary. Participants reported that induction into a strong, positive school culture was fostered through a combination of human resource, structural, and environmental support. Several cited the role of their mentor as a gateway to meeting colleagues and learning the workings of the school as a whole. They also indicated that while both the district- and

school-level orientations were useful, they felt that the school-based session was more immediately applicable to their daily operations. Additionally, principal support of and involvement in social events helped BTs to feel they were a part of the school culture rapidly.

Sub-Question 4

What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

The participants recognized their professional inexperience and the need for opportunities for growth in their practice. These offerings were identified within the theme of structural support under the sub-themes of observation, professional development (PD), and provided opportunities. Interviewees shared that they felt the PD offerings were relevant and useful, and they appreciated the greater flexibility with individual choice that was incorporated during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also felt that they greatly benefited from opportunities to observe experienced teachers in action in the classroom, both in the presence of their mentor and independently.

Observation. All of the participants conveyed the significance of the observation process in the development of their professional growth and self-efficacy. They also referred to the importance of a non-threatening pre- and post-conference for making the emphasis on growth rather than punitive measures. Kelly had recently been observed and said:

> Anytime that I'm observed by [my principal], she always tries to give me the . . . pluses and the minuses. Like, here's what's working, and how can I help you with this? In my post-conference today, we talked about it even more, and I felt like I was able to get even more questions clarified.

Sarah emphasized the importance of giving "positive, critical feedback of the BT, what they're doing, constructive criticism. There's always, of course, going to be things to work on."

Mary, Alice, and Caitlyn discussed ways that their principal put them at ease before and during observations using constant reassurance that their purpose was not "a gotcha, it's not a 'here's what you need to do.' It's 'okay, this is what's going well, and here are small steps to help you improve,' " according to Mary. Alice and Caitlyn both shared that their principal used the observation process to foster growth – thus minimizing their anxiety. Alice also mentioned that because her principal is so frequently in her classroom, she is less nervous during observations because "he knows what's going on." She shared that based on her principal's feedback, she thought, "Okay, so I know I'm doing something right." Bryan's principal shared his observation with him prior to the post-conference, giving him time to review her feedback in advance. She also included questions for discussion that allowed him to consider how he was meeting certain standards or how he might do so by adjusting his future instruction.

Professional Development. The district has traditionally provided a menu of PD offerings designed to support the perceived needs of BTs. The participants indicated that these offerings have been very helpful in fostering their professional growth. Danielle said, "I just think in general, they are really helpful and specific . . . I do feel like there's a lot of different things offered where if I need help with something like that, I could go to that PD."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the district implemented a more flexible policy around BT-specific PD sessions by requiring reduced participation, moving many of the sessions online and to an asynchronous format, and expanding the opportunity for self-selection based on each BT's own evaluation of their areas of growth. Interviewees indicated that this greater flexibility was a welcome change. Danielle explained that "it's helpful that we're not required to go to all

of them, but there's a lot available and we get to pick and choose what we feel like, that will be the most helpful for us." Sarah said:

> We've been given several online PD seminars to help us work through whatever kind of sessions we wanted to go to . . . I feel like it was pretty self-guided in letting the BTs pick what they felt like were their areas for improvement, so I feel like that was helpful because it was pretty self-paced.

Danielle also praised the change in the format because it allowed her to expand her knowledge of instructional practice while enabling her to target her individual needs without causing additional stress. She shared:

> There's just been a lot less stuff at the county office. It's all been online, so it's been helpful for me because it's been so much more flexible. In the beginning, there were so many times where I'd be busting out of school to try and make it to the county office for this PD that I was required to go to, and this [asynchronous format] is a lot more flexible. I think that's really helpful for me, and I feel like my time is more valued. I understand that it's helpful to have these PDs, and I do find them helpful, but at the same time, sometimes it's hard to be required to go to things when we already have so much to do.

Sarah expressed some concern over the perceived lack of support from the district office when the number of offered sessions was dramatically reduced. She indicated that although sessions had been offered almost weekly in the past, during the COVID-19 pandemic it had become almost completely optional and independent work as students and teachers struggled to adjust to the current situation. She said:

> Now, it's kind of, you're on your own, and we got an email earlier this week that said, "You can do what BT PD if you want, and here it is if you want to do it . . ." I do feel like

> I was pretty supported last year. I think that just with the COVID . . . it's kind of the BTs have just been put to the wayside and that's understandable.

Sarah also felt that more direct involvement by her principal in the BT PD offerings would foster her professional growth by encouraging conversations with her principal around the specific PD content and its implementation in her classroom. Sarah asserted:

> I think that principals should come to those meetings, you know, as available, even if they're just coming in for the Zoom or whatever it may be. So, they can see what their BTs are getting exposed to, and they can kind of then follow up with them . . . They can have a follow-up conversation with their BTs about it. I think it would be helpful.

Several participants emphasized the importance of principal involvement in decisions related to PD. Kelly remarked on the fact that her principal had recently coordinated a PD session for school staff during a faculty meeting, and her assistant principal was directly involved in the presentation along with two other colleagues. She felt that this involvement demonstrated their commitment to being deeply involved in supporting their staff.

Mary indicated that principal involvement in PD implementation is of critical importance, even if the principal is not the presenter. She stated, "They don't have to be the one showing how it's [done] in practice, but even if they're not the ones giving the professional development, having [knowledge of] resources to bridge that gap is helpful." She felt that because of the principals' closer proximity to their BTs, the PD sessions they coordinated were often more relevant than district-level offerings as the principals were more directly aware of their BTs' needs. Additionally, while all of the participants commented on the usefulness of the district-led PD sessions, Kelly stated that she felt that "even if I were at a different school, I'd be getting the

same thing" and the district-led PD offerings had no bearing on her decision to remain at her current school.

Provided Opportunities. Four of the participants mentioned specific opportunities provided for them by either their principal or the district that they felt had improved their instructional practice. Of these, the one reported as most beneficial was the opportunity to observe experienced teachers in action – either with a mentor or independently. Kelly reported that her principal:

> . . . paid for me to have a sub for a whole day so I could go and visit other classrooms in the school and observe classroom management strategies. She picked classrooms for me to go to that had some challenging kids so I could see how those teachers handled that, and that was beneficial.

Similarly, when Mary approached her principal with concerns about specific aspects of her classroom practice, her principal's specific knowledge of the strengths of her staff members allowed her to offer Mary some suggestions for observations that might help to meet her needs. Mary said that when she expressed a need for support in facilitating small-group instruction during a grade-level meeting, "They said, 'Go watch the first-grade teacher. If we need to find coverage, we will find coverage, but go watch this teacher."

Bryan's principal, in collaboration with the district, provided him with a similar opportunity by encouraging him and his mentor to travel to a different school to observe an experienced teacher in practice. According to Bryan:

> One of my favorite things that is supported by our principals, but also at the district level, is being able to go and observe a different teacher outside of our classroom or outside of our school itself. And so, being able to do that and see in a different setting with different

> students how a teacher does things, along with our mentor being able to go with us, that was one of the best things as a BT that I experienced.

Bryan expressed that sharing the opportunity with his mentor improved his self-efficacy because his mentor was "learning alongside of you . . . and you're able to both have a different perspective coming in; you're both able to learn something so it's a learning experience for two different people."

Sarah also shared that she was provided the opportunity to serve as the facilitator for her districtwide professional learning community, and she felt that she has:

> Gotten a lot of professional development, just through that program. So, while that's not directly related to being a BT, I feel like being a facilitator has helped my instruction because it's really helped me hone in on my standards and break them down with my team.

Sub-Question 4 Summary. Participants reported that the structural supports provided by observations, PD offerings, and other opportunities, including observing experienced teachers and fulfilling leadership roles, enhanced their professional growth as BTs. Participants whose principals used the observation process as part of a growth model felt greater confidence and self-efficacy regarding their classroom practices. The wide range of available PD sessions and increased flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic were praised by most interviewees. They also indicated that they felt strongly about their principals' involvement in the selection and planning of PD opportunities. Principal and district support to leave the classroom for a day and observe experienced teachers in action was also cited as one of the strongest methods of improving instructional practice.

Chapter Summary

Through this study, the researcher examined the interview data from eight BTs in a school district in rural northwestern North Carolina and identified three themes and 16 sub-themes. These themes were human resource support, environmental support, and structural support. The identified sub-themes were acculturation, approachability, assigned mentor, availability, belonging, culture, encouragement, feedback and coaching, orientation, principal support, professional development, provided opportunities, scaffolded support, social events, and trust. The final chapter includes an analysis of these findings as they relate to the study's research questions along with recommendations for practice and possibilities for future research studies.

Chapter 5. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction process influences both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of BTs in a rural district in northwestern North Carolina. It was intended to provide a better understanding of the perceived needs of BTs in terms of administrator support and better equip principals and assistant principals to engage with the BT induction process to foster self-efficacy among BTs and improve retention. The overarching research question in this study was: How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy? To answer this question, the researcher also explored the following questions:

1. What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?
2. What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?
3. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?
4. What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

This phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews and document reviews to answer the research questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data were analyzed using emergent coding and the analysis of significant statements by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Pertinent themes and sub-themes were identified based on inherent patterns in

participant responses. Following initial coding and theming, data were recoded and matched to provide further specificity around the essence of the participants' lived experiences.

Through data analysis, the researcher identified three themes and 16 sub-themes connected to this work (Figure 3). The themes included human resource support (those activities undertaken to support the overall growth of teachers), environmental support (the factors that affect the organizational health of the school as a whole), and structural support (the components that provide the foundation and framework of the institution). The identified sub-themes were acculturation, approachability, assigned mentor, availability, belonging, culture, encouragement, feedback, observation, orientation, principal support, professional development, provided opportunities, scaffolded support, social events, and trust.

Figure 3

Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Bandura (2012) described four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and choice processes (see Figure 1). Several of these sources were indicated during the interview process when participants shared their experiences as BTs. During the coding process, mastery experiences and social persuasion were the most frequently highlighted sources of self-efficacy and were most closely associated with the sub-themes of encouragement, observation, scaffolded support, trust, and working conditions.

Discussion

Research Question Discussion

How do BTs' perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy?

Trust. The results of this study confirm that trust is an underlying component of building self-efficacy among BTs. Multiple participants conveyed that a strong degree of trust in their principal increased their security and confidence. When the principal projected confidence in the teacher's abilities, a form of social persuasion, the teachers felt more capable of strong classroom instruction. Their strong classroom instruction, in turn, begat success on behalf of their students and resulted in mastery experiences for the teachers. These experiences are one of the four sources of self-efficacy posited by Bandura (2012; see Figure 1) and serve to continue to foster the self-efficacy development of BTs. Conversely, a lack of trust with the principal damaged self-efficacy beliefs for BTs and led to what Sarah described as isolation and, she said, "made me feel pretty unconfident as a teacher."

These results align with the foundational research in Chapter 2 that indicates that trust is an essential component in both teacher development and school culture (Schneider, 2003). Developing effective classroom practice requires that teachers be willing to take risks, which, in

turn, requires an individual acceptance of vulnerability (Brown, 2018). Without trust between teacher and principal and the resulting willingness to step outside their comfort zone, teachers are likely less effective than they might be, and students may experience less success as a result. In order to foster self-efficacy among teachers, and consequently among students, principals must create an environment of mutual trust and respect in their schools.

Feedback. Six of the eight participants in this study discussed the significance of their principal's feedback during the observation process and its bearing on their self-efficacy. They commented that quality, specific feedback had helped to lessen the anxiety in the observation process and encouraged them to make instructional adjustments. Overall, the teachers felt that feedback, both positive comments and constructive criticism, indicated the principal's investment in them as a teacher and the desire to see them grow and become even more successful. The participants' comments indicated a form of social persuasion on the part of the principal and had a positive effect on the BTs' self-efficacy.

Abitabile (2020) found that BTs seek out authentic feedback focused on areas of both strength and growth. This research confirms the results of other studies that indicate that BTs want their principals to be involved in and supportive of their classroom practice (Abitabile, 2020; Berg, 2019; Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Harris, 2015; Holland, 2009; VanderPyl, 2007). Particularly during the first stage of teacher development as BTs work to build their level of instructional competence (Pratt, 1989), specific, quality feedback focused on BT growth can be a powerful reflective tool. As shared by the participants in this study, social persuasion on the part of the principal during observations and post-observation conferences can then lead to subsequent mastery experiences and further increases in BT self-efficacy. The data indicate that

principals should prioritize time within their schedules to give careful consideration to BT observations and provide as much specific feedback for areas of strength and growth as possible.

Encouragement. While the sub-theme of feedback included some elements of encouragement, this category was of such significance that it became an independent sub-theme. Five of the eight participants indicated that their principals offered them specific encouragement outside of the observation process that served to increase their self-efficacy via social persuasion. Several of the participants conveyed that because their principals reminded the BTs so frequently of their confidence in the BT's abilities, the participants internalized and ultimately believed what they had been told. Kelly shared that her principal "always says . . . she only takes the best of the best, and . . . whenever someone says that enough . . . you're like, wow. I got a job here. I must be the best of the best." The idea that the principal trusted the BT to do their job without constant supervision or micromanagement elicited a strong self-efficacy boost. Others shared similar stories that reinforced the power of the principal's specific communication of confidence to BTs and how that confidence had a reciprocal effect on the BT's own self-efficacy. Based on this data, the positive effects of continual principal encouragement on BTs' self-efficacy warrants careful consideration and implementation.

Sub-Question 1 Discussion

What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 1-3.5 years of teaching)?

Acculturation. BTs felt it was of paramount importance for the principal to engage in their initiation into the school culture. Onboarding staff members, particularly BTs, as soon as possible, granting them early access to school-level communications such as email, and including them in beginning-of-the-year events gave the BTs a feeling of welcome and initiation

into the school's culture. Several BTs mentioned the importance of the principal's communication regarding school and district expectations. Questions about school policies concerning access to resources, expectations for faculty dress, and requirements for attendance on inclement weather days were specifically mentioned as components of school culture that are often overlooked but that should be specifically addressed by the principal. These statements reflect Habegger's (2008) findings on building a positive school culture which included an emphasis on clarity and transparency with stakeholders. By eliminating uncertainty around foundational policies for BTs, principals can allow them to focus on improving their instructional practices and collaborating with their colleagues. These findings indicate that early and intentional acculturation of BTs may yield growth in self-efficacy as well as a decline in job-related stress.

Availability. The results of this study confirm Chapter 2's findings that BTs' confidence is enhanced by principals who are visible and available to assist them. Six of the eight participants felt encouraged to seek advice or assistance from their principal based on the principal's presence in their classroom on a regular basis and their early encouragement to reach out if there was ever a need. This encouragement was extended to BTs outside of school hours and, sometimes, prior to the official hire date; an example was Mary's principal sharing her cellular phone number immediately.

Three of the participants specifically mentioned their principal's open-door policy and the reassurance it provided them by allowing them to ask questions or talk with their principal without fear or concern. Steele and Whitaker (2019) refer to the concept of "management by walking around," a supervision technique that encourages principals to spend a portion of their day making themselves available for conversations with teachers by walking throughout the

school building. The participants' comments on principal availability echo the legitimacy of this strategy.

Approachability. All participants in this study indicated that as BTs, they needed a combination of both availability *and* approachability from their principals. It was significant for them that their leaders were easy to talk with and encouraged the BTs to seek them out for advice or assistance. Ruder (2006) emphasized the importance of approachability as a quality of an effective principal and highlighted the significance of an open door (before, during, and after school hours) and listening carefully and respectfully during conversations. This study supports the significance of principal approachability in supporting BT induction. Bryan shared that his principal is available "even sometimes to complain to" but then helps him to move on with his day. The principal's approachability increased BTs' confidence and allowed them to grow in their practice, secure in the knowledge that if they were in need, the principal would be supportive and provide assistance. These findings also support research from Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) and Ingersoll (2012) that indicates that regular, open communication between BTs and school leaders improves retention.

Feedback. The coding process revealed feedback as both a means of increasing BT self-efficacy and an expectation of the role of the principal. The participants in this study affirmed that not only does quality feedback increase BTs' self-efficacy, but it is also an activity in which the school principal should be actively engaged. Particularly for smaller schools with fewer personnel resources, the role of the principal as an instructional coach cannot be overstated. The BTs in this study expected the principal to offer instructional feedback and possess the institutional knowledge to help them put that feedback into practice by recommending experienced teachers whom they could observe in action; some described this process as a

"bridge." Cansoy and Parlar (2018) and Holland (2009) support the need for the principal to serve as an instructional leader in the building. Research from Chapter 2 indicates that the classroom teacher has a greater direct influence on student achievement than any other factor, and, therefore, the principal should take an active role in supporting teacher growth through specific, meaningful feedback. Data from this study reinforce this finding.

Scaffolded Support. Four of this study's participants commented on the need for scaffolded support for BTs. This support was described in two ways: as a gradual reduction in hands-on support throughout the years in the BT program and through the consistent use of modeling. Several BTs mentioned the need for more frequent contact during the first year in the classroom with the intention of providing both encouragement and constructive feedback as they are learning the craft. Mary reflected on this process during her own tenure, likening her first year to being lost in an amusement park with no knowledge of whom to look to for help. In her second and third years, she compared her principal and assistant principal to lifeguards – available if she needed help but, otherwise, just watching over her. Additional support in year 1 could help to combat the decrease in self-efficacy beliefs that Swan et al. (2011) found at the end of the first year of teaching.

Caitlyn also appreciated that her principal had never taken a situation out of her hands and dealt with it herself. Rather, she had always provided suggestions and modeled how she would handle the circumstance while empowering Caitlyn to make her own decisions. She indicated that this support had made her more capable of dealing with issues without her principal's guidance as she gained more experience. As suggested by the data, a scaffolded approach to BT support can foster self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness.

Sub-Question 2 Discussion

What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?

Assigned Mentor. With an attrition rate of nearly 50% for BTs within their first five years, it is critical to provide as many supports as possible for those who are new to the profession. One of the most often-cited and influential supports is the mentor teacher (Ingersoll, 2012). The findings in this study supported this assertion, with every participant discussing the important role their mentor had played in their decision to remain in the teaching profession. For the lone participant who indicated a desire to leave her school, the relationship with her mentor was an integral part of her decision to remain through the school year. Although several of the BTs were unaware that their principal had played a role in the selection of their mentor, they were all complimentary of the strength of the pairings. Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) found that mentors were often the first line of support for BTs, a conclusion supported by Mary's statement that she goes to her mentor first when she is faced with challenges.

Belonging. A sense of belonging is essential to the formation and maintenance of a BT's identity (Bjorkland et al., 2020). As such, the participants' sense of connectedness within the school and district was a key factor in their persistence at their school sites. Nearly all of the interviewees referenced the power of their relationship to their colleagues and community, including Mary who said, "It's not just a 'me' thing, it's an 'all of us together' thing." While several teachers indicated that they may not remain in education for the duration of their working careers, three specifically mentioned that they planned to remain at their school until they left teaching because of the sense of belonging they felt there.

The overall sense of connectedness throughout the community was also a factor in retention. Several participants discussed their community involvement and shared that when they were recognized in the community by families and members of district leadership, it gave them a feeling of kinship and inclusion. As supported by Habegger (2008) and others in Chapter 2, these findings uphold the importance of a sense of belonging, to both the school and community, in minimizing teacher attrition.

Culture. DuFour et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of school culture in guiding the work of the members of the school community. Research from Chapter 2 also indicated that the establishment of a supportive school culture is critical for the induction and retention of BTs. The results of this study emphasized the significance of school culture on reducing teacher turnover and improving BT effectiveness. The researcher noted that five of the eight participants, from two different schools in the district, referred to their school as a "family" and expressed confidence in their principal through the principal's intentional promotion of the concept of school as family. The use of this description began for several BTs as soon as they were hired with the principal's first phone call inviting them to become a part of the "family." These principals continued to promote this familial culture in their everyday practice, from email messages to verbal reminders in staff meetings. For Bryan, the school's culture was a huge incentive that helped him to justify his long daily commute. Data from this study uphold the research regarding the effect of school culture on teacher retention.

Principal Support. This study found that principal support was a strong contributing factor in teacher retention. The principal's honesty and consistency in the face of challenges and the translation of those characteristics into support and modeling for their teachers encouraged these BTs to face their own struggles in the same way and to remain in the environment that

inspired them to do so. Principal support served as a form of social modeling to replicate strong positive culture in individual classrooms, as well. Mary commented that her principal's recognition of her areas of strength, while continually working to improve on areas of growth, inspired her to do the same in her classroom and with her students.

Danielle, Samantha, Caitlyn, and Mary explicitly connected their desire to continue at their specific school with the culture built by the principal. Sarah, who expressed feelings of isolation and uncertainty due to the non-supportive school culture built by the principal, noted these were contributing factors to her desire to move to a different school. A lack of principal involvement can certainly be a factor in increased teacher attrition (Abitabile, 2020), and based on the findings of this study, the opposite is also true: strong principal support encourages teachers to stay in their schools.

Sub-Question 3 Discussion

What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?

Assigned Mentor. All of the participants shared that their mentor had been a major factor in their assimilation into the school culture. Samantha mentioned her mentor as the most significant aspect of the BT induction program in relation to school culture, and said that her mentor helped her to become a part of the greater school family. Bryan and Kelly felt that their mentors helped them to learn "why we do what we do" and introduced them to the staff as a whole – integrating them into the school's social groups. Alice also felt that her mentor was an integral part of her initiation into her school's culture, and viewed their age difference as an asset for her as it allowed her to build relationships with her colleagues who "literally could be your mom."

These revelations align with research by Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) and Ingersoll (2012) which indicates that mentors are critical for BT growth both within and outside the classroom and serve as resources for fulfilling personal and professional needs. This research also supports Whitaker's (2020) admonition for principals to take great care when assigning mentors as this assignment can signal the principal's approval for the BT to imitate the mentor's practices. Because the BT-mentor relationship can have such a dramatic effect on BTs' growth and development, it is important for principals to be deliberate in establishing and nurturing these connections.

Orientation. An orientation session is a critical component of the BT induction program and serves to integrate BTs into the wider school culture (Carroll, 2007). The orientation process is a foundational piece of the induction program that serves to convey the collective vision of the school and district to new employees and "help move [BTs] into our school culture," as Bryan said. Four of the eight participants discussed the orientation as a means of introducing them to the district's vision and overall culture. However, they also voiced the importance of the school-level orientation and emphasized its influence on their day-to-day practice. Mary felt the school orientation was more applicable for her because, while the district orientation reviewed the requirements of the induction program that applied to all district BTs, each school had different needs and emphases based on their staff and student populations. Samantha also highlighted the importance of the school-level orientation, thus affirming Lunenburg's (2011) assertion that orientation at both levels is crucial for BT success and immersion in the school culture.

Social Events. The participants in this study frequently mentioned the effect of school-sponsored social events on their initiation into the school's culture – a finding that supported Balkar's (2015) research on empowering teachers. BTs shared that organized social events

helped them to get to know their colleagues and gave them the feeling that their administrators encouraged them to "be friends with the people you work with." Several of the participants mentioned their principal's role in planning for these activities and how their involvement fostered a sense of community and a positive school culture which is a finding supported by the research in Chapter 2. Four of the interviewees expressed disappointment that their school's social activities were interrupted or changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic seriously curtailed district-level social events, interviewees still mentioned those opportunities to gather with their counterparts from across the district as beneficial for them in terms of networking and a sense of belonging. They held that it was valuable for them to "have some candid conversations about what was going on in our classrooms" during the BT PD sessions.

Sub-Question 4 Discussion

What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?

Observation. In North Carolina, BTs receive four full (45-minute) observations each year along with opportunities to discuss their performance with their principal and peers (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2020a). Weisberg et al. (2009) found that these additional observations, in conjunction with other components, can support BTs in gaining experience and improving the quality of their educational practice. All of the interviewees reported on the significance of the observation process in their growth as educators. Several participants referenced these opportunities for feedback positively and as a means through which they could meet and discuss their growth with their principal. Bryan specifically mentioned that he had utilized the quarterly opportunity to collaborate with his principal and develop his instructional and pedagogical strategies.

It was important to BTs that the observation and associated conferences be as stress-free as possible. Four of the eight participants shared that their principals visited their classrooms often to ensure awareness of the BT's classroom practices and frequently reassured them about the purpose of the observation. Mary said that her principal calmed her nerves by reminding her that the aim of the observation was not "a gotcha, it's not a 'here's what you need to do.' " Rather, the observation served to help the principal provide specific feedback to aid the BT's development. These results support research by Brezicha and Fuller (2019) that express the significance of trust in the observation process.

The results of this study also indicated that the feedback BTs received in their post-conferences as part of the observational process is critical to their continued growth. Regarding the discussion of their observation data, several interviewees referenced the confidence they gained from these conferences with their principals who, according to Kelly, provided both "pluses and minuses" based on what they saw in the classroom. While the BTs recognized that they all had room for improvement, their principals' feedback also indicated to them that their leaders believed in their potential for growth. As indicated by the research in Chapter 2, BTs want an engaged principal who celebrates alongside them and offers suggestions to improve their practice.

Professional Development. This study concurs with the research presented in Chapter 2 that highlights the importance of PD offerings in facilitating the instructional growth and development of BTs. Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) found that targeted PD is the induction component that best meets the professional needs of BTs, and Wilson (2011) determined that a high-quality PD program has the potential for the greatest return on investment in terms of improving teacher quality. All interviewees specifically mentioned their participation in the

district-led PD sessions as instrumental in their development as educators. They also desired the engagement of their principal in decision-making around PD offerings. Participants felt that their principals were most familiar with their needs and the needs of their school and should be directly involved in the coordination of any BT-specific PD sessions. Additionally, although principals do not necessarily need to be directly involved in the presentation aspect of PD itself, it increased trust between and solidarity with their teachers to see them so engaged and supports a finding echoed by Holland (2009).

While BTs greatly benefit from specially-designed PD that addresses their needs as inexperienced educators, they can easily become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information with which they are expected to engage and implement (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). This finding was supported by the participants' comments on the greater flexibility of PD sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic and how expanded opportunity for choice in session selection and delivery format was "helpful" and made them feel that their "time is more valued."

Provided Opportunities. This study concludes that allowing BTs to observe experienced teachers in action is one of the most powerful practices a principal can implement. Four of the participants were encouraged by their principal and supported by their district to take time away from their classroom for visits with seasoned educators. In some cases, they visited in the presence of their mentor which allowed for collaborative discussion and growth; in others, they visited alone with the principal's recommendation for specific practices to observe. In these instances, the principal's institutional knowledge of their teachers' strengths was instrumental in directing the BTs to individuals they could emulate. These findings are supported by research in Chapter 2 – specifically by Jonson (2008) and Whitaker et al. (2019) who encourage teachers to

observe one another to alleviate disconnect within the building and build stronger relationships between BTs and their colleagues.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on a review of the relevant literature and an analysis of the data from this study, the researcher offers several recommendations for practice for individual principals and for districts planning and implementing a BT induction program.

Individual Practice

The findings of this research indicate that BTs need human resource, environmental, and structural supports from their principals. The data reveal that a well-rounded and high-quality BT induction program, supported by the principal, includes elements of all three types of support and offers BTs a comprehensive plan of assistance during their first years in the classroom. The study found that BTs' self-efficacy is enhanced specifically by the mastery experiences, social modeling, and social persuasion created as a result of these supports. Based on this synthesis, the researcher offers the following recommendations for principals' individual practice:

1. Principals should engage with BTs as soon as possible after they are hired and provide specific supports prior to the first day of school. By sharing their contact information and adding BTs to the school email lists, principals ensure that BTs are engaged with the school culture and their colleagues long before they report on the first day. Principals should also coordinate a school-level orientation session that introduces BTs to the school's culture and clarifies expectations around professional policies such as teacher dress, working hours, and instructional resources.
2. Because the mentor is of paramount importance to the development and success of the BT, principals should take great care in making these assignments. Mentors

should be able to offer both encouragement and constructive feedback and provide instructional recommendations while initiating the BT into the school culture. The influence of the mentor can shape the BT's practice and attitude for years to come, and the principal should take this into careful consideration when instituting these partnerships.

3. The relationship between the BT and principal has a dramatic effect on the BTs' self-efficacy and retention. Principals should cultivate a level of trust with their BTs and utilize social persuasion to remind BTs of their value and potential in the classroom as frequently as possible. They should also strive to be available for questions or concerns whenever possible and maintain a high level of honesty and approachability in their interactions.
4. Social events are not only opportunities for interjecting fun into the workplace, but they serve as occasions for networking between BTs and their more experienced colleagues. Principals should be involved in the planning and execution of opportunities such as luncheons or meals, celebrations, and service events that bring together staff members of all ages (and sometimes their families) to build a positive school culture.
5. Principals know their staff members and the needs of their school better than anyone and, thus, should be directly involved in the planning and implementation of PD offerings for their BTs. Although it is not imperative that they personally deliver the PD sessions, such participation, when possible, allows staff members to see the principal engaged in collaboration with them and builds a feeling of solidarity. When BTs are engaged in PD offerings, the principal should strive to be aware of the

content and follow-up with the BT to offer any clarifications or support during implementation.

6. BTs may learn best by seeing theory put into practice. Principals should make every effort to encourage and support BTs' observing experienced teachers in action – both through their verbal encouragement and by budgeting adequate funding to cover any accrued costs. This opportunity for social modeling should be extended for BTs to experience both in the presence of their mentor and independently while following the specific recommendation of the principal as to which classroom to visit. A subsequent discussion of the observed strategies and techniques, as well as a conceptualization for putting them into practice in the BTs' classroom, should always be encouraged.
7. During observations, principals should make a sustained effort to provide specific, authentic feedback that includes areas of strength *and* growth. Post-conferences should focus on these areas, as well, and offer BTs an opportunity to discuss what went well and what they can do to improve with the principal's support. Particularly in smaller schools with fewer personnel resources, principals should endeavor to fulfill the role of instructional coach for BTs by not only providing feedback, but also helping them to incorporate any suggestions into their classroom practice and to foster mastery experiences.

District Planning

The BTSP in MCS has implemented a scaffolded approach to BT-specific PD over the last few years by requiring attendance at a greater number of sessions for first-year BTs and reducing the number during years 2 and 3. However, the district has issued no clear guidelines

for principals regarding a tiered support plan with additional check-ins for first year BTs; it could be a worthwhile consideration. Additionally, two teachers mentioned having challenging groups or classes as first year teachers and noted the struggles that they faced in learning how to be an effective educator while managing high-needs students. Although this was not a direct connection made by the participants, Grissom et al. (2021) cautioned principals to take care when assigning difficult classes to inexperienced teachers due to the potential negative effect on self-efficacy and student achievement. Where possible, it would behoove districts to limit this type of classroom assignment and allow a more measured introduction of BTs into challenging situations after they have had time to build their teaching repertoire.

While research indicates the importance of the principal in supporting and retaining teachers, particularly BTs, clear guidance on the principal's areas of greatest influence that aids in both maximizing results and spending time more efficiently are needed. Based on this research, principals can leverage these themes and utilize the principles of the sub-themes to foster opportunities for increased self-efficacy and improve retention among their BTs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation One: An Expanded Sample

This study was conducted in a single school district in rural northwestern North Carolina and included data from a small number of teachers in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 8th. This research study could be duplicated in additional districts with schools that cover more traditional grade spans, such as elementary (K-5) and middle (6-8). As this study was conducted in a small rural school district, it could also be replicated in urban and suburban settings in schools of a variety of sizes. The validity of the research could be further confirmed with an expansion of the participant pool. This could entail a greater number of total interview participants from a larger

number of schools. A longitudinal study of the same design, but based on a cohort model, could also lend itself to disaggregation of data based on years of experience to determine if BTs themselves report consistent differences in needed principal support as they grow in their practice.

Furthermore, of the eight study participants, only one was male. Additional research with a more balanced participant population could yield greater generalizability of the findings. Because this study was not conducted using any high school teachers, future research should be undertaken to determine if the supports identified and sought out by elementary and middle school teachers align with those of secondary teachers.

Recommendation Two: Implications of COVID-19

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the participants indicated that the resulting emergency changes to the school structure had affected their participation in the BT program. The situation was a limitation to the current research design, and this study should be duplicated at the conclusion of the pandemic to determine if the results were affected by the unprecedented challenges presented by the crisis.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine how the involvement of the principal and assistant principal in the BT induction process influenced both self-efficacy and retention from the perspective of BTs. Ultimately, the researcher's goal was to provide practical advice for principals and assistant principals that allows them to support their BTs more effectively and encourage those BTs to stay in the classroom while gaining effectiveness through experience and positively influencing student growth and achievement.

Data collection from semi-structured interviews suggest that there are specific ways in which principals and assistant principals can be involved in the BT induction process to support BTs more effectively. The implications for practice align with both interview results and the research conducted for the literature review. BTs need to be engaged with their principals early and often, and principals need to take an active role in supporting BTs via the assignment of the mentor and offering opportunities for growth through quality feedback and PD. The results of this study are presented as guidelines for principals to foster self-efficacy and retention among their BTs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Pre-Script	● Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. My name is Rachel Shepherd, and I am a doctoral candidate at East Tennessee State University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program. Throughout my career in education, I have worked with beginning teachers, as a colleague, mentor, and professor. I am currently an assistant principal, and one of my responsibilities involves supporting beginning teachers. ● My study is focused on understanding the role of principals and assistant principals in the beginning teacher induction process and how BTs' perceptions of that involvement influence their self-efficacy and retention. The aim of this research is to help principals and assistant principals better support BTs in developing strong self-efficacy and stay in the profession and in their school. ● Our interview today will likely last between 45 minutes and one hour. During this interview, I will ask you a series of open-ended questions to better understand your experience and perspective. I may ask some follow-up questions based on your responses. There are no right or wrong answers, and please be as honest as possible. As a reminder, our conversation is for educational purposes only. It will be kept confidential, and your responses and information will not be personally identifiable. ● Do you have any questions so far? ● When you agreed to participate in this study, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record our conversation today via Zoom. Are you still ok with me recording our conversation today? ___Yes ___No ● Thank you! Please let me know at any point if you would like for me to pause the recording or keep something you have said off the record. ● *[Review consent form.]* ● Before we begin, I want to be sure to clarify some terms that I will be using to ensure that my questions are as clear as possible. Do you mind if I run through those quickly? ○ For the purposes of this interview, the abbreviation **BT** will be used to describe beginning teachers, or those within their first three years as a teacher in a public school classroom in North Carolina. ○ The **BT induction process** will be the term used to describe the support programs and opportunities provided by —— County Schools and your particular school during your first three years as a teacher. These support programs and opportunities include orientation, professional

	development opportunities, assigned mentors, and observations. ○ The term **self-efficacy** will be used to describe your confidence in your own ability to meet and overcome challenges and complete difficult tasks. ● I will also be asking about both principal and assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process. Does your school have an assistant principal? ___Yes ___No *[If No, skip questions related specifically to assistant principal.]* ● Before we begin, do you have any questions? *[Discuss, if any.]* If at any point during this conversation you have any questions, please feel free to ask them.
Initial Questions	*To begin our conversation, I'd like to know a little bit about your background and your experiences and methods as a teacher.* 1. Tell me a little about your background. Can you describe your current teaching role and why you decided to become a teacher? 2. Tell me a little about how your teaching skills match your job expectations. 3. In general, what do you feel is a principal or assistant principal's role in supporting teachers?
How do BTs perceptions of (a) principal and (b) assistant principal involvement in the BT induction process influence their self-efficacy?	*Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about how your principal or assistant principal's involvement in the BT induction process has influenced your self-efficacy.* 1. How would you describe your principal's involvement in your school's BT induction process? 2. How would you describe your assistant principal's involvement in your school's BT induction process? 3. How would you characterize that involvement's influence on your self-efficacy in the classroom?
What is the role of the (a) principal and (b) assistant principal in supporting the BT induction process, as perceived by BTs (in their first 3.5 years of teaching)?	*My next set of questions focuses on your perceptions of the role of your principal or assistant principal in the BT induction process.* 1. What do you feel is the role of your principal in supporting you in the BT induction process? 2. What do you feel is the role of the assistant principal in supporting you in the BT induction process? 3. How has your perception of that role changed from your first days of teaching to now?
What aspects of (a) principal and (b) assistant	*Now, I would like to ask some questions about how your principal or assistant principal's involvement in the BT induction process has influenced your plans to remain in teaching and at your current school.*

principal involvement in the BT induction process influence teacher retention, as perceived by BTs?	1. How would you characterize your desire to stay in your current school? In the teaching profession? 2. How has your participation in the BT induction process influenced your plans to stay in your current school? In the teaching profession?
What aspects of the BT induction process best facilitated their initiation into the school culture, as perceived by BTs?	*I'd now like to ask you a few questions about how the BT induction program has helped you to become a part of your school's culture.* 1. What aspects of the BT support program focus on initiating BTs into the school culture? 2. How has that involvement influenced your self-efficacy?
What aspects of the BT support program best facilitated their professional growth and instructional practice, as perceived by BTs?	*In this final set of questions, I'd like to know more about how the BT induction program has helped you to grow as a professional and in your instructional practice.* 1. What aspects of the BT support program focus on improving your professional growth and instructional practice as a BT? 2. How has that involvement influenced your self-efficacy?
Interview Post-Script	● Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else that you would like to share with me that we haven't touched on? ● Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me today. Once I have examined all of the data I collected today, I would like to talk again for a brief meeting to review any further questions, ask for any clarification for any of your answers, and allow you to review the transcript of today's interview to be sure that my analysis accurately reflects what you meant to convey today. ● If you think of anything else or have any questions after today, please be sure to contact me at ——. *[Include email address in chat box.]* Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Hello! My name is Rachel Shepherd, and I am a doctoral candidate at East Tennessee State University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program. I am conducting a research study to examine the role of the principal and assistant principal in the beginning teacher induction program and how that involvement impacts beginning teachers' self-efficacy and retention.

Participants in this study should:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be physically present in the United States
- Be a teacher with between 1-3.5 years of experience in the classroom
- Have been employed in ——— County Schools for at least one year
- Be currently participating or have recently participated in the beginning teacher induction program in ——— County Schools

Participants in this study will engage in a recorded Zoom interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. After interview data has been analyzed, participants will be asked to attend a follow-up Zoom interview, lasting approximately 15 minutes. In this session, the researcher will ask any clarifying questions and share the participant's data with him/her to ensure that the analysis matches the participant's original meaning.

You have been identified as a potential participant in this study. There is no monetary compensation for your participation; however, your responses will contribute to the body of knowledge that assists principals and assistant principals in supporting beginning teachers. The risks to participants are minimal, and all data will remain confidential and anonymous.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please review the attached informed consent document, print and sign it, and return it to me, Rachel Shepherd, at ——— . If you have any questions, please reach out to the email address above or ——— .

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Rachel Shepherd

VITA

RACHEL SHEPHERD

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	M.A. Educational Media/Instructional Technology, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, 2011
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Professional Experience:	Assistant Principal, Watauga High School, Boone, North Carolina, 2017-Present
	Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, Clemmer College, 2019-2021
	Instructional Technology Facilitator, Watauga High School, Boone, North Carolina, 2016-2017
	Teacher, Ashe County High School, West Jefferson, North Carolina, 2004-2016