

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Beginning Teachers' Experiences Working in a Low-Performing School with a Non-District Affiliated New Teacher Support Coach

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In an attempt to improve the effectiveness and retention of beginning teachers (three or fewer years of experience) in North Carolina, the New Teacher Support Program was developed using grant funding through federal Race to the Top money. The program operates on a three-phase induction plan, which includes a five-day summer institute, individualized coaching, and targeted professional development. Utilizing four anchor universities across the state (East Carolina University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), the program provides beginning teachers a new teacher support coach who is affiliated and employed by the university and not the school or the school district. This article presents the results of a qualitative study that explored the experiences fourteen beginning teachers had working with a non-district affiliated coach and the impact that it had on their induction phase within the profession. Results indicated that beginning teachers valued the unique support of having a non-district affiliated coach and that this support differed from the support provided by their district and/or school. Beginning teachers also indicated being significantly impacted by the support that was provided by their new teacher support coach. This research study discusses the serious problem of beginning teacher attrition and how a unique non-district affiliated coaching model provided support to novice teachers in the University of North Carolina at Charlotte region.

*Keywords:* beginning teachers, induction, coaching, mentoring

Although beginning teachers are among the most common teachers in public schools today, they are less likely to remain in the profession (Ingersoll, 2012). Numerous studies (e.g., Hafner & Owings, 1991; Huling-Austin, 1990; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010) have proven the attrition rate of first-year teachers as an existing problem, stating that nationally 40 to 50 percent of new teachers leave within the first five years in the occupation. Recent research documents that schools are now often plagued with teacher shortages, specifically in low-performing schools, due to the

percentage of beginning teacher attrition (Achinstein et al., 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Such schools are often described as “revolving doors” because a significant number of teachers leave long before retirement only to be replaced with another beginning teacher who continues the cycle (Ingersoll, 2012; Miller & Chait, 2008). In addition, with the knowledge that teachers new to the profession are more likely to be placed in a low-performing school and be less effective in boosting student learning compared to more experienced teachers who remain in more affluent schools (Carroll & Foster, 2010; Raymond Fletcher & Luque, 2001; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001), it is not surprising to see achievement gaps between socioeconomic classes.

Furthermore, data indicates that beginning teachers report lack of adequate support from the school administration as one of the main factors for leaving the classroom (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). While participation within induction programs that offer support to beginning teachers has significantly increased, beginning teacher attrition remains a critical problem today (Ingersoll, 2012). Continued research on the type of support provided during the induction phase is necessary to help those who enter the teaching profession stay and continue to grow. The purpose this study was to examine how one such program impacted new teachers, specifically looking at the uniqueness of the relationship between a beginning teacher and a non-district affiliated support coach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

With the increase in the number of beginning teachers in public schools today, it is no surprise that induction programs have evolved. Although various researchers (e.g., Cohen & Fuller, 2006; Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2008; Ingersoll, 2012; Kelley, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) provide evidence that teacher induction programs have positive impacts on beginning teachers including retention, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness, critics argue that induction programs are often “under-conceptualized, under-developed, under supported, and under-funded” (Berry et al., 2002 p. 2). Induction programs typically provide the following to beginning teacher: a four- or five-day orientation prior to school beginning, consistent professional development over a period of two to three years, and an integration of a mentoring or coaching component (Breux & Wong, 2003). Although researchers (i.e. Breux & Wong, 2003; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) agree that mentoring and coaching are the most critical components within an induction program, the extent of these supports often vary by program and often fall short in providing the support needed for beginning teachers to remain in the profession (Goldrick et al., 2012).

### Mentoring

Researchers (e.g., Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Gardiner, 2012; Schwille, 2008) agree that the purpose of mentoring should be to help new teachers learn from their practice in order to develop the skills and habits of mind that lead to continuous professional growth. A mentor teacher serves as a person who often meets with a beginning teacher on a consistent basis in order to share knowledge, skills, and information pertaining to the

school. In addition, mentors may also model lessons and observe and provide feedback to beginning teachers (Wong, 2003).

In addition to these responsibilities, Carver and Katz (2004) emphasize the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship being built upon trust. Without a mutual trust, an in-depth study of a beginning teacher's experiences, skills, and growth will not be explored (Carver & Katz, 2004). It is suggested that mentors not be involved in the formal observation or assessment process of their mentees because it would possibly cause the beginning teacher to be less likely to share problems and concerns with the mentor (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

## Coaching

Similar to mentoring beginning teachers, coaching has also emerged as a strategy to improve teacher effectiveness. Wong and Wong (2008) describe coaching as another component of the induction process that is often beyond mentoring, since coaches are hired full or part-time to solely support the needs of teachers within a school. As such, coaches have more of an opportunity to support a teacher within their classroom thus establishing job-embedded professional development that is collaborative (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004; Wong & Wong, 2008).

Common coaching activities consist of instructional modeling, joint lesson planning with teachers, co-teaching, formal observation and feedback, informal one-on-one contact/conversations, and mentoring (Knight, 2004; Poglinco et al., 2003; Roller, 2006; Wong & Wong, 2008). Coaches must be a knowledge resource and help the teacher reflect on their practice. In addition, coaches need strong interpersonal skills such as tact, patience, good communication abilities, and flexibility to create a positive and trustworthy relationship with a teacher (Poglinco et al., 2003).

## Types of Support

Support for new teachers can be described as being either emotional or instructional in practice (Grossman & Davis, 2012; Pomaki, et al., 2010). Emotional support can include the following tasks: helping beginning teachers cope with challenges, encouraging beginning teachers, providing information about the daily workings of the school and the cultural norms of the school community, promoting cultural proficiency regarding students and their families (Villani, 2002). While this support is valued by beginning teachers and may help reduce teacher attrition, instructional support aims to improve the pedagogical knowledge and skill of beginning teachers (Grossman & Davis, 2012). Instructional support includes providing resources, discussing pedagogical decisions, and peer coaching (Grossman & Davis, 2012; Villani, 2002).

There is a need to better understand the significance of the supports provided to new teachers, specifically in high-needs schools, in order to retain and develop strong teachers within the profession. Since induction programs vary and are often expensive to design and implement, more data is needed to determine what ways new teachers can and should be supported. This information is critical to states, districts, and schools since

induction programs have shown a positive impact on the retention and effectiveness of new teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

This study sought to identify the attitudes and beliefs common among beginning teachers in low-performing schools and examine their experiences with working with a non-district affiliated full-time new teacher support coach. In studying the relationship and experiences beginning teachers had with their coach, school leaders can better understand and improve the support beginning teachers receive.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and beliefs teachers in their first three years have about their experiences working in low-performing schools with a non-district affiliated new teacher support coach. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do beginning teachers perceive their first years of teaching in low-performing schools with a non-district affiliated new teacher support coach?
2. How has having a non-district affiliated coach impacted the self-efficacy and development of beginning teachers in low-performing schools in North Carolina?
3. What supports did beginning teachers perceive receiving from their new teacher support coach?

To examine the experiences beginning teachers had working with a non-district affiliated new teacher support coach, a hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted by six of the New Teacher SupportCoaches. Phenomenology denotes the study of the essence of an experience as lived-in-the-world by a subject and case study provides focus and permits context to be taken into account (Schwandt, 2001). The hermeneutic tradition denotes interpretation of being-in-the-world, in that this research design “reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire” (van Manen, 1997, p. 8).

This study searched for meanings contained in 14 interview transcripts of beginning teachers. The participants within this study were selected because they all experienced what it means to be a beginning teacher in a low-performing school with the assistance of a non-district affiliated support coach. Since phenomenological studies permit the study of the human experiences, the aim was to understand the world of a beginning teacher in a low-performing school from the teacher’s point of view and to unfold the meaning of their experiences with their new teacher support coach.

### Population

Participants (n=14) within the study were teachers who had no more than three years of experience of teaching and were members of the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program. This induction program provides beginning teachers a full-time new teacher support coach who is employed and affiliated with an anchor university of higher

education, not the school or school district. Each beginning teacher within the University of North Carolina at Charlotte region (n=153) was e-mailed to invite them to volunteer to be interviewed. From the volunteered participants, 14 were randomly selected by placing all names in a computer-generated randomized list program. A demographic table that describes each participant in respect to age, years of experience (1-3), grade level taught, type of school (urban or rural), and entry into the profession (lateral or traditional) was developed (see AppendixA).

## Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected by one-on-one interviews in what van Manen (1997) termed *conversational interview*. Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner as a list of flexible questions were designed and asked in order to guide participants in discussing and exploring the experiences participants have had as beginning teachers working in high-needs schools with the assistance of a non-district affiliated New Teacher Support Coach. The semi-structured approach allowed for the researchers to respond to the experiences of the participants and to new ideas that may have emerged during the interview (Merriam, 2009)

The interviews were conducted by the support coaches within the region. In order to alleviate bias or concern of participants feeling pressured to respond in certain ways, the coach who interviewed the participant was not his/her primary coach. These interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and were audiorecorded for transcription purposes. Before an interview took place, an informed consent form that outlined the study was provided to each participant who was asked to sign it. The coach used an interview protocol that consisted of open-ended questions to guide the conversation but used probing cues to engage participants in a conversation.

## Theoretical Framework

Researchers (Feiman-Neimser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2012; Wong, 2003) claim that the induction period is when a teacher learns and develops most throughout their career. Illeris' Three Dimensions of Learning Model in adulthood was used to analyze the experiences of beginning teachers in this study. The model consists of three dimensions involved in learning: cognition, consisting of the knowledge and skills; emotion, consisting of feelings and motivations; and society/environment, consisting of interactions with or contributions of other people (Illeris, 2004). This framework was selected because beginning teachers are often confronted with learning the cognitive aspects of teaching such as pedagogy, lesson design, and implementation while also experiencing a multitude of different emotions such as success and failure that impact their development as teachers (Feiman-Neimser, 2001). In addition, the school's context and support provided serve as the environmental factors that interact and shape the learning process of a beginning teacher (Wechsler et al., 2010). The model links to the experiences of beginning teachers as they are often met with new and often challenging experiences that provide them the opportunity to learn and develop as teachers (Feiman-

Neimser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2012; Wong, 2003).

## Data Analysis

Each of the six support coaches used open coding to analyze the data from the interview transcripts and to determine emergent themes. Transcripts were read and re-read to identify textual and structural descriptors pertaining to the experiences beginning teachers had working with their new teacher support coach. While coding, the researchers identified references and direct quotes that pertained to Illeris' Three Dimensions of Learning Model. Three different colored highlighters were used to identify references made pertaining to cognition, emotion, and society/environment. Since each coach coded multiple interview transcripts, they were able to adjust their notes and codes as necessary throughout their individual analysis.

Next, coaches met to compare and contrast notes and codes in order to categorize them into consistent and emerging themes. This collaboration led to a variety of ways of analyzing and interpreting the data: "a shared research team builds codes and coding builds a team through the creation of shared interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382). Coaches compared and contrasted notes and codes in order to determine and agree upon the most relevant and consistent themes. In addition, coaches compared the colored coding of three dimensions of learning in order to establish trustworthiness of the findings and data.

## Limitations

As with most research, there are aspects of this study that should be strengthened when conducting similar research in the future. From a research design perspective, assembling focus groups with beginning teachers would have enriched the findings of their experiences within their low-performing schools. This would have allowed participants to share more as well as react to the experiences of other participants.

This study was also limited solely to beginning teachers who were working in low-performing schools. The researcher recognizes that changing this setting could yield a different perspective of support and coaching provided to beginning teachers.

A final limitation includes the process of interviewing all of the participants. While attention was taken to ensure that the participant was not interviewed by their individual coach, some participants may have had interactions at professional development sessions with the coach who interviewed them. This presents a limitation in that participants may have answered differently had the interviewer been a complete stranger.

## FINDINGS

Several themes consistently emerged after individual and collaborative analysis of the interview transcripts. It was evident that beginning teachers preferred and benefitted

from the support provided by their non-district affiliated New Teacher Support coach. Participants made consistent reference to how this support differed from support provided by administration or school support staff because it was non-evaluative or nonjudgmental, consistent, and specific to their individual needs. Looking closely at the type of support beginning teachers referenced revealed that they received both emotional and instructional assistance from their New Teacher Support Coach. Finally, the beginning teachers made consistent reference to the importance of trust and honesty when it came to their relationship with their New Teacher Support Coach. The following provides an explanation of the consistent themes along with direct quotes from participants.

### Non-evaluative Support

Unanimously, participants referenced how beneficial it was to have a non-district affiliated new teacher support coach because there were no official evaluative components associated with the support provided. The beginning teachers within the study all made references about how often they were being observed (either formally or informally) by the support provided by the school and how beneficial it was to have a coach who was not evaluative. Participants consistently mentioned how they felt “judged” within the school if they were having struggles or difficulties in their classroom. Dana expressed this mentality in describing her non-district affiliated coach and the support staff within her school:

I know that when I am struggling or having problems my coach is not going to fault me for it unlike some support staff who report back to the principal. Or even if I make a mistake in my classroom with my coach it’s not going to be the end of the world, and it’s not going to be tied to my record or the evaluation process at the end of the year. Instead it is going to be an opportunity to learn.

Like Dana, participants consistently mentioned the major difference between the support provided by their school and their coach was that of a manner of evaluation. Beginning teachers viewed their school-based support as more evaluative in nature, and with that often expressed fear of punitive consequences. Bethany expressed a sense of paranoia in describing her school-based support, “You are constantly just being critiqued all the time. It feels like they’re watching you, so you always have to watch what you say and do.”

Since non-district affiliated coaches were third party support solely reporting to their teachers, it changed how participants viewed being observed. MaryGrace expressed the difference between how she felt when being observed by her coach:

Usually when people come and observe me I obviously get a little bit nervous. Not with my coach. I get excited when she comes in because I know that maybe if I’m lacking in something she’ll give me an idea or she’ll help me if I’m getting overwhelmed. She isn’t there to evaluate me for my principal, but instead to support me.

Because they felt like their school support was linked to their evaluation process, beginning teachers expressed more fear and nervousness about their struggles in the classroom. In addition, they expressed that they needed to be “more careful” talking about their experiences within the school to their school support in fear that their frustrations or struggles would be reported to the principal and impact their evaluations. Beginning teachers unanimously expressed how beneficial it was to have a support person, their coach, who was not there to evaluate them but only offer support.

## Consistent and Holistic Coaching

The beginning teacher participants expressed that the coaching they received from their non-district affiliated coach was consistent and “holistic.” Their descriptions of their coach and the support the coach provided indicate that beginning teachers were supported based on their individual needs. Beginning teachers expressed how being consistently available was a critical component of the support that their coach provided. Lola expressed, “Just the presence in the schools, like always being there coming into the classrooms, just talking through things with me, spending time—that really has been really instrumental in my success.” Carmen expressed how the consistency of visits not only impacted her, but also her students as well:

My coach is very visible. I see her all the time. She builds relationships with students one-on-one within the classroom, which the other facilitators ...maybe that’s not their plan to do that but it’s really neat that she’ll come in and the specific child I’m thinking of looks forward to her every visit. And if she doesn’t show up then we wonder where she is.

In addition to consistent visits, beginning teachers viewed the work of their non-district affiliated new teacher support coach as “holistic.” Participants described how their New Teacher Support Coach was more involved within their classrooms and with their students. This type of coaching allowed for the teachers and students to be the priorities during coaching visits in order to focus on the development and improvement of the teacher for the students. Susan described her coach as an involved member of the class:

When he [non-district affiliated coach] comes in, he’s hands on. He helps. He goes through groups. He was just here yesterday, and we were doing jigsaw. He was there to say, “What about we do this? How about we do this? How about we do this?”

Participants described how their new teacher support coaches were more active within their classrooms as opposed to school-based support staff who mainly filled out evaluative checklists that offered little to no feedback. Participants felt as if their coach knew their students and felt comfortable with their coach working one-on-one with them.

## Emotional Support

Participants in the study described receiving encouragement and emotional support from their coach. This was the most consistent support expressed with nine different beginning teachers mentioning how it positively impacted their experiences as beginning teachers. Audrey described how encouragement from her coach allowed her to gain perspective:

Definitely there are days where I'm like, "This is so hard," and I feel like I'm not doing it [teaching] right. My coach will be like "You've only been teaching for a few months. This is not your tenth year." It kind of puts things in perspective when you have someone encouraging you.

Several of the participants expressed that their coaches were there for them during the most challenging times, and that their encouragement was influential. MaryGrace expressed how her coach helped her when she was facing challenges:

I leaned on my coach for so much this year, and I always felt like she was there when I was headed in a downward spiral. She was there to pick me back up a little bit, and always stressed that teaching was a challenge for *anyone*, and that I was learning how to be the best teacher I could be. She never judged me for my struggles, but instead told me to make them into opportunities to change and grow. That helped me and motivated me all year long.

## Instructional Support

Participants also expressed how they received instructional support from their non-district affiliated coach. As mentioned early, beginning teachers described how consistent and active their non-district affiliated coaches were while visiting them in their classrooms. As a result, participants related how this provided ample opportunities for them to receive instructional support from their coaches in a variety of forms.

Several of the participants described how their coaches would informally observe them and provide effective feedback on their teaching. The beginning teachers in the study referenced how frequently they were observed by school-based administrators or support staff without receiving any form of feedback or encouragement to improve. To them, they viewed these observations as being "watched" or a way to create a "paper trail" of the struggles and challenges they experienced. In contrast, beginning teachers consistently expressed how their coach would offer effective feedback on their teaching. Megan expressed how her coach consistently provided both constructive feedback about her strengths and weaknesses:

Because my coach was consistently in my room, she knew my teaching style. She would observe me and tell me things about my teaching that I didn't know. She would give me advice about things I was struggling with, like group work, and then also tell me what my strengths were. This always made me feel like she was truly there to help me grow.

In addition to receiving feedback on their teaching, beginning teachers mentioned how beneficial it was having a coach who was willing to actively participate in their classroom. Participants mentioned that their non-district affiliated coaches were willing to either model or co-teach lessons so that the beginning teachers could observe them teach. Collette described how beneficial this was for her:

My coach prepared a lesson for my students so I could watch. It was so helpful to see how my students responded to a different person teaching them. I was able to watch, take notes, and then incorporate what I saw that worked into my own teaching.

Participants also referenced how having a coach helped them outside of their classroom with planning instruction, finding resources, and making assessments. Several beginning teachers expressed how their non-district affiliated coach offered to meet with them after school in order to plan their lessons. Lola described how she was struggling with planning a group project for her middle school students. She described how her coaches helped her better prepare her lessons:

I was doing a group project with my students and I was just kind of like going to throw'em into it without really thinking of how I was going to structure things. My coach slowed me down and made me take it step-by-step. He helped me really hone in on how to get to the point, how to better prepare my students to do the work and get the work done. Because I was better planned, I think my students were more engaged and I had less problems to deal with.

Becky described how the classroom experiences that her coach had were valuable to her development:

She's just really knowledgeable and very helpful and always has something ready for me. Or if she doesn't she'll go and she'll find it and she'll always follow up with me, if it's resources, ideas for classroom management strategies for my child that I have right now with Aspersers. Her experience is really helpful to me.

Finally, Lola compared her experience with her coach to that of her experience working with her volleyball coach:

I played volleyball in high school and in college, and a coach coaches you. They tell you that you can change this. You can fix this. They can say, "This is how it should be done, let me show you. Let me see you do it." That is how I feel about my new teacher coach.

## Trust and Honesty

In addition to the descriptions of the types of support provided by their coaches, participants consistently expressed the importance of confidentiality within their

relationship with their non-district affiliated coach. Because coaches were third-party support, beginning teachers expressed how they were more honest with or trusted their coach more than the support provided by the school. Bethany described how she felt about her coach, “I view the university-based coaches more on a peer based relationship – so that, right there, kind of takes some of the pressure off, so that way, I feel like we’re able to be more honest, be more real.” Carmen described her hesitation of being honest with her school support because she feared it would have a negative impact on her evaluations:

We have a [support] program here at [the school] but these people work for the district. They do assist; but, to me, they also judge because everything we do has a paper trail, so you feel like you can’t be honest, you can’t be sincere about concerns that you have because everything you’re saying is being monitored.

The beginning teachers also expressed the need to often “vent” about the challenges or struggles they were experiencing or opinions they had about their school. They felt more comfortable doing so with their non-district affiliated coaches because a trusting relationship had been established. Becky expressed this stating:

Venting to my coach is something I probably do too much but I think it is because I trust her and feel like she wants me to be honest. It helps that I have someone outside of my school to be honest about my frustrations and not have to worry.

Angie described how expressing her frustrations with her coach was often exactly what she needed to do in order to move past them:

Sometimes I just need to complain in order to see a solution and my coach helps by listening and offering suggestions. I know that what I say to her stays between us and that she wants to help me not get me in trouble for how I may feel at times. Having someone who knew that I was trying my best, even when I know I wasn’t at my best, made all the difference.

## DISCUSSION

There is growing research for the necessity and importance of retaining beginning teachers. Scholars (Corbell, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Kardos & Johnson, 2007) argued that the rapid attrition of beginning teachers continues to transform schools and the field of education. This current research study supports the arguments for the benefits of providing effective support and coaching to beginning teachers. These supports must be incorporated into the induction stage in order for beginning teachers to develop and learn from their challenging experiences instead of running away from them. However, the support provided for beginning teachers must also be specific to the unique challenges beginning teachers face.

The findings corroborate the value of having a full time, experienced teacher focused on mentoring and coaching beginning teachers (Fletcher, et al., 2005; Glazerman et al., 2010; Goldrick et al, 2012). Participants consistently commented on the level of

access they had with the New Teacher Support coach and the range of tasks the coach could assist with. The fact that meeting the needs of beginning teachers is the primary task of a new teacher support coach, allowed for the flexibility needed to sustain consistent collaboration between the coach and beginning teacher. This proved critical for participants and if anything, greater consistency and collaboration was desired, thus also highlighting the need for policy to keep coach to teacher ratios low.

The creation and maintenance of a third space (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torres, 2011; Rutherford, 1990) or free space (Heath & Heath, 2010) in teacher induction can help mediate the power structures that can inhibit open, non-punitive dialogue among stakeholders in student learning. This was the case in Pomaki et al. (2010) where it was found that support from colleagues, rather than from superiors or administration, is a significant factor in teacher attrition. The idea here is that by eliminating the role of authority from collaboration, and instead focusing on collaboration and support from peers is significant regarding professional growth and professional intentions (Pomaki et al., 2010). For the purposes in this article, it is the non-district affiliated New Teacher Support Coach who created this third space for beginning teachers to attempt new techniques, ask questions, and creatively negotiate the art and science of teaching and learning.

In addition, the role of trust (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009) emerged as paramount for participants. Whether to vent, try new techniques, ask for help, or to have meaningful and sometimes difficult conversations regarding classroom teaching, the fact that their New Teacher Support coach was in no way connected to the districts or schools proved critical. It appears that a mediating factor in participants' positive perceptions of support was the fact that the coaches were not there to be evaluative in a punitive sense, but rather as partners in a collaborative-team sense.

Illeris' Three Dimensions of Learning Model, consisting of cognition, emotion, and environment, provided a framework for understanding and interpreting the data. The beginning teachers consistently described how their New Teacher Support Coach was influential in supporting the cognitive aspects of teaching such as lesson planning, classroom management, differentiation, and effective implementation strategies. The participants made references to how it was beneficial to have a New Teacher Support Coach who was an experienced teacher with a wide range of pedagogical knowledge.

In addition to referencing instructional support, beginning teachers emphasized that their New Teacher Support Coach supported their emotional needs throughout their experiences. Participants unanimously preferred the support from their non-district affiliated coach because they felt they could trust them more. This factor is important as some participants mentioned that they were more comfortable "venting" to their New Teacher Support Coach because they knew he or she was not a part of the school or district. In contrast, the beginning teachers in the study expressed a great deal of frustration with constantly being "judged" or "evaluated" without receiving effective feedback from the administrators, facilitators, or mentors in their schools. These feelings often lead to more frustrations for the beginning teachers. It is critical that beginning teachers feel that the support they are receiving is effective and genuine.

The dimension of environment refers to the interactions with people that occur while learning occurs (Illeris, 2004). Beginning teachers in the study relied on the support that was offered to them by the people they were surrounded by and trusted. Many

participants related the importance of forming relationships with their colleagues, in particular their teaching teammates. In addition to forming bonds with their colleagues, beginning teachers also expressed how having a coach who was willing to be hands-on within the classroom made an impact on their development. Participants described how their coaches were willing to model and co-teach lessons and how this was beneficial to their growth as a teacher. This type of support contrasted with the description of the school support that tended to be more evaluative with little to no feedback.

The addition of support coaches, to any teacher, changes the often-criticized “sit and get” form of professional development in education. The beginning teachers in this study related the importance and significance of having their coach consistently in their room with them while they were teaching. In addition, beginning teachers valued and benefitted from their coach being willing to co-teach or model lessons within the class. Instead of leaving the classroom for a day or two at a time to attend a workshop, the teacher receives on-the-job support that pertains to the experiences he or she is having on a consistent basis. This provides teachers the opportunity to learn and reflect on their experiences as they are occurring with the support, guidance, and advice from an experienced mentor or coach.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings can help inform teacher induction policy, design, and implementation. It is recommended that beginning teachers be provided non-district affiliated support coaches throughout their entrance into the profession. The hiring of the coaches will be a critical point in the process, but the findings suggest that teachers appreciated the classroom teaching experiences, and practice and working with diverse students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. From the experiences of the teachers, it is recommended that every measure be taken to ensure, sustain, and preserve the non-evaluative, confidential relationships between coach and teacher. This is a critical component that deserves attention, as beginning teachers quickly determined whether they felt like they were being truly supported or whether it was mere evaluation with no real feedback. While the evaluation process is important, beginning teachers deserve the opportunities to be supported without the risk of punitive measures.

The role of honesty and trust was instrumental in the relationships that formed between the beginning teacher and coach. Participants consistently mentioned being more honest with their non-district affiliated coach because they trusted him or her. Without the trust, beginning teachers tended to hold back or not be honest with support staff. It is recommended that this be emphasized in the definition and roles related to coaching and mentoring. In addition, establishing this relationship should be included in the training and professional development of coaches and mentors.

While this current study focused on understanding the experiences beginning teachers have working in a low-performing school with a non-district affiliated support coach, there are implications for future research. To extend this study longitudinally, the participants could be followed throughout their years of experience in the classroom to determine how induction support impacts retention rate. Currently, eleven of the fourteen beginning teachers are still teaching at the same school. Future interviews could be

conducted with those who remained to determine how the support provided within their initial years continued to impact their teaching and desire to remain in the classroom, while interviews with those who left could reveal implications as to why beginning teachers who receive induction support are still exiting the profession.

There are also implications for future quantitative research. While the qualitative data provides a narrative of the experiences of beginning teachers, collecting and analyzing student achievement data during the induction phase of the participants would provide possible evidence of how induction support, in particular coaching, impacted the student learning.

Finally, this study was limited to beginning teachers in low-performing or high-needs schools. A replication of this study in a more affluent school would determine if support for beginning teachers is universal or specific to the context of the school environment.

## CONCLUSION

Beginning teachers face challenges upon entering the classroom that many do not anticipate. As a result, beginning teachers are bombarded with having to make important decisions that ultimately impact their effectiveness as a teacher and the achievement of their students. These decisions should not be made in haste or without consultation. Instead, beginning teachers should be provided support in the form of full-time mentors or coaches throughout a comprehensive induction program. Matching experienced coaches and mentors to novice teachers allows for a meaningful and collaborative relationship that provides beginning teachers an opportunity to develop and grow within a profession that appears to be closing the door on them at a rapid and dangerous pace. A final quote from Collete relates the importance of beginning teachers remaining in the profession today and how this will ultimately impact the future:

Having a support coach in your beginning year makes you feel that there are people out there that realize how important teaching is and try to push you and motivate you to keep doing what you're doing in order to get better. The support I'm receiving now is the support I hope to one day provide to a future beginning teacher.

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## Appendix A - Participant Demographics

TABLE 1  
Demographics

Participant	Licensure	Grade level	Subject	Race	Career Changer
Bethany	Traditional out of state	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	All core subjects	African American	
MaryGrace	MAT Out of state	9-12	Biology	White	
Dana	Traditional Out of state	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Science	African American	
Angie	Traditional Out of state	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	All core subjects	White	
Susan	Traditional & TFA In state	K-8	Spanish	Latina	
Lola	MAT Out of state	K-8	Art	White	Yes
Audrey	Lateral Entry In state	K	All core subjects	African American	
Becky	Lateral Entry Out of state	4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup>	Literacy		
Rachel	Traditional In state	6-8	Agricultural science	White	
Carmen	MAT In state	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	ELA	African American	Yes
Leigh	Lateral Entry In state	7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup>	EC/SBS	African American	Yes
Nichole	Lateral Entry In State	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	SS/science	African American	
Carter	Lateral Entry In state	9-12	Civics	White	Yes
Collette	Traditional Out of state	8 <sup>th</sup>	ELA	African American	

## Appendix B - Interview Protocol

### Opening Questions

- 1) Can you briefly describe your pathway into teaching?
- 2) Why did you become a teacher in a low performing, high needs school?
- 3) What are your professional goals?

### Content Questions

- 4) How do you describe your teaching experience thus far?
  - a. *What has been instrumental to you in your teaching experience thus far? Are there certain people, resources, trainings, structures, etc. that you credit for some of your success?*
  - b. *Have you experienced any struggles so far in your teaching career? Either individually or collectively?*
    - i. *If yes, can you describe any specific incidences or experiences?*
    - ii. *Are the aforementioned struggles resolved or on-going? How and why do you think this is?*
    - iii. *In your opinion what would be or have been the ideal solution?*
  - c. *Have you been surprised by anything in your teaching profession so far?*
    - i. *If yes, can you describe any specific incidences or experiences?*
    - ii. *How do you negotiate or manage such moments?*
- 5) How would you compare and contrast your working relationships between district- or school-based coaches, facilitators, etc and your UNC-Charlotte based support coaches?
- 6) Are the UNC-Charlotte coaches helpful?
  - a. *If so, how? Can you describe specific times when you found this to be the case?*
  - b. *If not, how? What do you think the UNC-Charlotte coaches should be doing instead of what you have experienced?*
- 7) Does having a coach who is non-district affiliated have an impact on your teaching, professional identity, or motivation to remain in the profession?

### Closing Questions

- 8) Is there anything else you would like to add or elaborate on regarding your teaching experience and your work with your UNC-Charlotte coach(es)?