CONSIDERING EARLY CAREER TEACHER ONBOARDING PROGRAMS THROUGH STORY AND EXPERIENCE

by

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Abstract

According to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), Canada's new teacher attrition rate is approximately 25-30% (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2017). Majocha et al. (2019) attribute teachers leaving the profession within the first five years to a feeling of abandonment and lack of support. This research study aimed to discover how current onboarding practices impacted new elementary school teachers (within their first three years in a contract position) in a Kindergarten-Grade 12 public school district. The three objectives for this qualitative research study were to use phenomenological interviews to uncover: 1) what aspects of teachers' onboarding experiences contributed to success in new teachers' professional roles, what could be improved, and what was missing from the process; 2) who was involved in the teachers' onboarding journeys, and 3) if and how participation in the formal school district mentorship program impacted teachers' onboarding experience. Participants' stories suggested that adjustments to current onboarding practices, specifically through the formation of professional in-school relationships and access to resources, can contribute to new teacher acclimation and success.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all new teachers who may be struggling to find their place. Your perseverance will make an impact on your students. Keep at it and you will do great things.

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Introduction

My teaching journey is a unique one in terms of how long I waited to accept a classroom position after graduation and the stops that I made along the way. After graduating from an accredited teacher preparation program, I decided to stay at my corporate job as a Training and Development Specialist, where I was responsible for designing and delivering various training programs and oversaw the new employee onboarding process. At the same time, as I did not want to lose a new position with the School District, I worked as a Teacher on Call (TOC). I condensed two weeks of corporate work into nine days and used the extra weekday to work as a substitute teacher in Kindergarten to Grade 5 classes within the district. I did not realize how valuable an experience I was gaining by working simultaneously with adults and children in an educational context. This value would soon become evident to me as I got further into my district teaching position.

Teaching has been a lifelong dream; looking back now as a teacher on my own experiences, I can better understand factors that impact professionals. From a very young age, I knew that I wanted to make a difference in children's lives by providing them with a positive school experience. As an elementary student, I remember having teachers who did not appear to enjoy teaching in a school environment. I knew that I wanted to be a teacher who showed my students that school is a fun, safe place to learn and I enjoyed being there with them. As an adult, I look back at what I witnessed as a student and understand that there were most likely many underlying factors as to why my teachers came across as disengaged or unhappy. However, I also maintain the importance of how we, as educators, show up. Ultimately, it comes down to the students for me as an educator. Everything that we as teachers do affects our students somehow,

and I firmly believe that before doing anything, we should always ask: “how will this benefit my students?”

I eventually quit my corporate job in adult education and took on a full-time public-school classroom position. By this time, I was eight years on from completing my formal teacher education and did not feel equipped for success. However, when I first started teaching elementary students, I found the experience refreshing and invigorating. Working with children was a welcome change, as the classroom was where I had always envisioned myself. As much as I felt that I was leaving the adult education world behind me, I constantly found myself unintentionally going back to it. I would make recommendations about how a staff meeting could be enhanced, how learning from professional development could be shared, or how teachers could collaborate. I realized that the former world that I felt had no place in my new role still held a place in my heart, and certain knowledge and skills could transfer over and stretch me as a teacher leader. I slowly began to see puzzle pieces fitting together. As I continued in my M.Ed. graduate studies journey, I saw different leadership routes that I could take to make a difference for students while working simultaneously with my adult colleagues. As a new teacher, my most significant interest was enhancing the Early Career Teacher (ECT) onboarding experience.

While completing this research study**,** I worked in a contract position as a Kindergarten to Grade 5 Learning Commons Teacher in two different schools within the same district. I shared time between a traditional (‘choice school’[i]) and a public elementary school. The Learning Commons role was a new position within our district created four years earlier. My role was to enhance classroom learning using technology and other collaborative methods that allow students to work in new ways that fit the district’s inquiry-based curriculum. As the Learning

Commons teacher, I had the rare opportunity to collaborate with every classroom teacher within the school. Unintentionally, I found myself working simultaneously with both adults and children within the educational context.

Having no formal induction or orientation to the role, I spent a lot of time learning the district's expectations and seeking reassurance and feedback from colleagues around whether I was meeting their needs. I came to the school district from a corporate world of comprehensive onboarding and orientation sessions, followed by probationary periods and regular check-ins. I was used to people 'working their way up' after proving that they could fill more junior roles. Teachers enter the profession without needing to prove their abilities before assuming the responsibility of a classroom full of students. Francis and Kane (2013) argue that new teachers are expected to manage "similar responsibilities as their more experienced colleagues" (p. 365) while working in similar school settings. I often questioned why the education onboarding model is so different from many other professions and why new teachers are often tasked to do the same job with the same expectation for results as those who have been in the profession for much longer.

Being new to the Learning Commons position while the Learning Commons role was itself new to the district, I constantly looked to the district curriculum department for guidance and support, only to encounter delays and, sometimes, no response. Because the role was so new, no one in my school could answer questions, often leaving me to figure things out on my own. I felt as though I had missed the onboarding experience that I was used to providing for new hires. I was curious about whether this was a systemic issue or just my experience. I began asking my colleagues about their onboarding and orientation in the district to hear that my experiences were not unique. Though my administrators offered their support through open-door policies, positive

affirmation, and allowing me to experiment with the curriculum with no judgments, they were busy running schools and looking after our most important asset: children. As a graduate student, I realized how my studies could couple with my experiences to provide me with the foundations to create change regarding how new teachers are onboarded. That change is the hope of this research study.

Context

When accepting my teaching position, I asked the Human Resources office when my orientation session was scheduled. The reply was that the session had already passed for that year. Knowing how valuable onboarding is for future success, I began my new position with hesitation overshadowing my excitement. Echoing Pike (2014), onboarding programs "help new employees understand their specific roles in the job and the company. By knowing what to expect and what is expected of them, employees feel more comfortable in their positions and will be more productive in a shorter amount of time" (p. 1).

One event that upset me and raised my awareness of the lack of any onboarding was when I first attempted to book a Teacher On Call (TOC). I did not know the protocols associated with being absent from work. After searching district websites and finding no clear instructions, I asked a colleague to walk me through the process. It was a memorable experience because it could have been taught through onboarding or orientation. As time went on, more situations arose where I needed to locate the correct resource to find answers to my questions and then wait for a response. As I had not yet built relationships that allowed me to make myself vulnerable enough to turn to my colleagues with my questions, I relied on my personal teacher friends. As time went on, I was more lost when I should have felt the opposite. Feeling socially alone with no formal check-ins or accountability, I was unsure whether I was performing my role at the

standards expected of me. Given the context of my own experiences of feeling unsupported and lost, my interest in and commitment to onboarding grew.

Research Questions

As a newer teacher with a passion for onboarding support, this research study intended to hear new teachers' stories to understand what a successful onboarding experience might entail. Hopefully, this study will create dialogue around the matter, ultimately resulting in students seeing their new teacher as excited and confident, rather than lost and confused. This study investigated new teachers' lived experiences of participating in some form of onboarding experience. Seven new elementary teachers within their first three years of teaching were interviewed about their experiences to understand how their early years were impacted by onboarding.

The research site was a small school district in British Columbia, Canada. This research study's three objectives were to use semi-structured phenomenological interviews to document 1) what aspects of teachers' onboarding experiences contributed to successful experiences in new teachers' professional roles, what could be improved, and what was missing from the process 2) who was involved in the teachers' onboarding journeys, and 3) if and how participation in the formal school district mentorship program impacted teachers' onboarding experience.

To understand the reasoning behind their answers, I was interested in hearing how each participant defined success by considered how teachers' experiences shape their definitions, expectations, realities, and professional objectives. The stories that emerged during this research provided new insights into how onboarding practices contributed to new teachers' conceptions of success and where adjustments might address new teachers' diverse professional needs more effectively. As British Columbia is currently experiencing teacher shortages and early career

teacher attrition, this study aims to contribute to the professional development and retention of new teachers by suggesting enhancements to current onboarding practices.

It is essential to understand how new teachers can be supported without feeling overwhelmed. Are there opportunities to step away from their own classrooms for learning experiences? Can teacher leader roles be created within schools to provide social connection and professional relationships when a new teacher starts? Would it be possible to create an in-school mentoring program to create an instant sense of community for the new teacher, making them feel less isolated and alone? The above questions inspired me to continue digging deeper into my research inquiry as gaps in the current onboarding process were uncovered.

Two specific factors further motivated me for this study. First, Ontario's New Teacher Induction program has had success with its mandate to improve student well-being and learning (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017). The program elements provide solid examples of an onboarding program that works in the public education sector. The program's success led me to probe further into new teacher onboarding as I believed that there was a need for such a program in other jurisdictions. The second motivating factor for my inquiry into new teacher onboarding was the current high demand for new teachers. With high new teacher attrition rates, identifying new teachers' barriers might assist in breaking the cycle of new teachers entering and quickly leaving the profession.

Research significance

As British Columbia experiences ongoing teacher shortages and significant early-career teacher attrition, this study provides timely insights into how onboarding practices can address new teachers' diverse professional needs and conceptions of success. I approached this study assuming a unified definition of the terms 'onboarding' and 'mentorship' existed in the

educational field. A need for further conceptualization became evident upon encountering the varied definitions used within teacher induction literature and by the new teachers in this study. Without at least some consensus, these practices may not be carried out consistently within education systems. By speaking directly to new teachers about their recent experiences, this study identified and addressed a current gap in onboarding research. I hope that the resulting recommendations can minimize previously missed components and maximize positive onboarding experiences that promote the retention of new teachers.

Literature Review

Defining Induction/Onboarding

There is no one concise definition of new teacher induction. Castetter & Young's (2000) definition broadly includes any teacher on a new work assignment: "Induction is a systemic organizational effort for helping personnel adjust readily and effectively to new work assignments so that they can contribute maximally to organizational goals while achieving work and personal satisfaction" (Castetter & Young, 2000 as cited in Baker-Gardner, 2015, p. 44). Meanwhile, Feiman-Nemser (2012) defines induction as "the process of incorporating new teachers into collaborative professional learning communities" (p. 1). Sometimes induction is referred to as 'onboarding,' a process that Pike (2014) says is designed to speed up the time it takes for a new employee to become productive while reducing various shock factors, with a critical component being assimilation to the school culture. The terms induction and onboarding were used interchangeably in the research explored for this paper, with varying terminology, timeframe, participant demographic, and logistics.

The one thread carried through all explanations of induction was the idea of support. Ireland et al. (2018) found that this support is most beneficial when thought out and structured. Their findings state that "[s]upport for teachers – in particular, the provision of well-structured formal support – is critical during these early years, contributing to both early career teacher job satisfaction and to retention within the profession" (p. 292). This same belief is shared by Aubusson et al. (2013), who suggest that early-career teachers' positive experiences result from a supportive and empathetic mentor. As Clandin et al. (2012) point out, "the lack of support on the professional landscape is an area often discussed when beginning teachers leave the profession of teaching" (p. 111). Thus, defining the term onboarding for teachers is the initial step in what needs to be a proactive process of defining the details required for a successful experience.

Support According to Early Career Teachers

Collegial Support

The surveyed literature leans towards new teachers looking for support from another teacher or teachers that they can connect with by talking, learning from (both pedagogical and practical knowledge), borrowing resources, shadowing, and observing. Aubusson et al. (2013) refer to this as collegiality. Clandinin et al. (2012) call this collaboration. Other researchers refer to this as mentorship. Andrews et al. (2007) found that beginning teachers highly valued opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers; however, a low percentage of them said this type of support was offered. The school administrator perspective, which may further explain the lack of offered support, is explored later in this paper. Birkeland and Johnson (2003) found that beginning teachers were more likely to stay in teaching and be satisfied with their jobs if they were part of an integrated professional culture that encouraged all members to collaborate in a collegial atmosphere. This claim circles back to Feiman-Nemser's (2012) definition of the

purpose of induction—incorporating new teachers into collaborative professional learning communities.

Connections with others in the school assist teachers assimilating to their new environment and not feeling as though they are on their own. As teaching can often feel like a solo experience, collegiality serves as a "welcoming gesture to the profession and the school" (Aubusson et al., 2013, p. 118). These authors also found that "collegiality can serve as a morale-booster to newcomers, both in terms of new knowledge, insights and perspectives gained" (p. 118). If collegiality can be built into the new teacher's induction process, the teacher can become a productive member of the school culture sooner. New teachers often feel "lost at sea, with little or no guidance from colleagues or curriculum" (Johnson, 2004 as cited in Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Collegiality could eliminate or reduce the time that new teachers spend being "lost."

Collegiality and collaboration are key factors in new teachers' success and contribution to positive school culture, benefiting themselves and their students. Berg et al. (2005), in a study around the effects of professional learning communities (PLCs) on school culture, found that "students learn more and teachers experience greater satisfaction and commitment when they engage their colleagues, improving instruction and strengthening schools" (p. 72). Birkeland and Johnson's (2003) study also concluded that the beginning teachers who were involved with integrated professional cultures (that encouraged collegial and collaborative relationships for all teachers) were (a) more satisfied with their jobs, (b) more likely to stay in the public education systems, and (c) more likely to stay in the same schools. These findings led me to integrate the question of who was involved in the onboarding process for the new teachers I interviewed.

Mentorship

Going beyond collegiality and collaboration models, which do not follow a rigid framework or set definition, mentorship is a more complex, structured approach for ensuring that new teachers have a consistent support network on an ongoing basis for an array of needs. According to Kirincic (2017), mentoring needs to be a "reciprocal learning relationship" (p. 368) where the mentor is also learning from the experience and is not merely situated to "dispense knowledge" (p. 368). The reciprocity can minimize the risk of the new teacher feeling like a burden but rather make them feel like a welcome partner in the process. Kutsyuruba and Walker (2017) explore mentorship through the new teacher lens via mentorship programs such as the Delta School District Mentorship Program in British Columbia, Canada, and Ontario's New Teacher Induction Program. Through their research, Davies and Hales (2017) found that "new teacher induction and mentorship policies, aims and approaches vary tremendously across British Columbia – as throughout Canada" (p. 351). The mentorship program's complex nature and varying structures provide evidence that mentorship must be a considered factor within induction but can be large enough to be a program of its own within the overarching umbrella of new teacher induction. These findings resulted in the inclusion of this study's interview questions around the participants' mentoring relationships to hear firsthand how new teachers define successful mentoring.

Kutsyuruba and Walker's (2017) extensive research around induction programs in Canada failed to produce evidence of a mandatory mentorship component or mention of a mandatory stand-alone mentorship program available to all ECTs in a district/province. The mentorship was either voluntary or conditional, an example being Toronto's New Teacher Induction Program which placed stipulations around who received a mentor based on job status

and length. New teachers needed to be placed in a contract of 97 days or longer to receive mentor support (Creery et al., 2012, p. 260). With the large workload placed on new teachers, reaching out to find a mentor or ask for help can be a daunting task on a new teacher's already overwhelming list of things to do. However, many early career teachers do seek out an informal mentor for support as "novice teachers are expected to immediately perform the very same roles and responsibilities as their experienced colleagues which is unheard of in other professional roles in Canada" (Majocha et al., 2019, p. 594). With the demand placed on new teachers, it seems imperative that they have a mentor for guidance. ECTs in Ontario described support as "help with report card preparation, curriculum planning, finding effective teaching resources and advice on supporting individual students" (p. 594). Mentoring relationships provide growth and reduce stress by improving lesson planning, classroom management, performance of administrative tasks, and other characteristics that ultimately improve student progress (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Sowell, 2017). This alignment is a clear example of the positive impacts of mentorship prevalent in the surveyed literature. Therefore, several questions arise: If mentorship has such a positive impact on early career teachers' success, how can it be made more accessible, perhaps on a mandatory basis to all? Can all induction needs be covered solely through a mandatory mentoring program?

Role of the School Administrator

Administrators are responsible for overseeing the activity within their schools and making decisions around matters such as funding or release time. Whitaker et al. (2019) suggest that a supportive administrator's role within the school is to intentionally pair up mentors with new teachers to provide support. They provide examples of how mentors can be chosen, including by "gender, age, or room location" (Whitaker et al., 2019, p. 52) and suggest that the

selection process may not be ideal. However, they remain firm that the task ultimately falls on the administrator. Given administrator workload, they may not be able to partake in every aspect of the induction process for their new teachers. However, some involvement is necessary to build a relationship with the new teachers and remove the barriers that can come with a hierarchical structure. Gonyou-Brown and Pollock (2017) use the analogy of ECTs being new drivers and principals being the roadside assistance dispatchers. As they have traveled the road before, administrators know which services to connect the new driver with to navigate the road conditions and arrive safely at their destination. As Carboni et al. (2007) state, "[p]rincipal leadership is instrumental for mentoring and teacher retention through supportive and shared leadership, values, and vision" (p. 212).

A national program for teacher induction launched in Jamaica included school principals as a critical component (Baker-Gardner, 2015). Principals were tasked with being a part of the new teacher induction program by developing and implementing a mentorship program for teachers within their schools. However, the pilot program determined that principals required a lot of support to run the induction program at a school level. Interviewed principals revealed that "they were not knowledgeable enough about the program to provide the kind of support that mentor teachers required, and they indicated that there was a need for better supervision of the program from the ministry" (p. 44). Similar findings emerged in Trinidad and Tobago, where early career teachers indicated they were missing out on pedagogical guidance and essential assistance from their principals. In Belize, principals indicated that they would like to be more involved in the induction program but lacked workshops and seminars to educate them on their roles (Samuels, 2011). Similarities were found by Gonyou-Brown & Pollock (2017) with Ontario principals working within Ontario's structured New Teacher Induction Program. In Ontario,

principals must develop and facilitate educational support for the ECTs in their schools rather than directly implement them. Going back to the need for collegiality and collaboration to facilitate support for the ECTs, Ontario principals identified "conferencing, co-teaching, and co-shadowing with experienced educators as beneficial learning strategies" (Gonyou-Brown & Pollock, 2017, p. 448). By working within the clearly defined confines of a structured program, Ontario administrators proved to be more successful than those working within programs that are still under development. According to Majocha et al. (2019), when teachers in British Columbia, under no formal induction process, shared their experiences around administrator support, they—like those in Trinidad and Tobago—stated that it was lacking. As one ECT stated, "administrators do not have time to walk around and check and make sure that everyone is doing okay. They are busy being administrators" (Majocha et al., 2019, p. 600).

Limitations and Considerations for Early Career Teacher Support

Looking at the identified gaps noted by early career teachers, it is evident that there are currently barriers in place restricting the design and implementation of a new teacher induction program that encapsulates all new teachers within a district (including Teachers On Call). Financial support at a district level that would reduce the workload for both teachers and mentors could help implement a structured program. With early career teachers and experienced teachers sharing the same workload and expectations, it is difficult for seasoned and new teachers to step away and partake in induction or a mentoring program without funded release time. Clarity and knowledge around the roles of administrator, mentor and ECT would also alleviate some of the ambiguity around induction and ensure that the ECTs do not slip through the cracks resulting in them leaving the profession. Another identified barrier is too much delegation, resulting in a lack of a transparent relationship between the new teacher and their administrator. Kutsyuruba and

Walker (2017) share the story of an ECT who "understood that her principal supported her growth by using the mentorship program, thus delegating mentorship tasks to another colleague, but the lack of transparency led her to pretend that she knew what she was doing in order to avoid administrative disapproval, which might, in turn, lead to nonrenewal of her contract" (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017, p. 120). Clandinin et al. (2012) explain that many variables limit the creation of effective PLCs (subject matter, interests, and types of support that specialty teachers require); these variables also make it problematic to create a culture of collaboration.

Findings and Opportunities for Further Research

This literature review emphasized how new teachers can be most supported, what that support looks like, and who plays a role in their success. A lack of support is a significant barrier to achieving job satisfaction and increasing pedagogical and practical knowledge, leading new teachers to leave the profession within the first five years. The literature studied explored this support in the form of a professional learning community or a strong mentoring relationship. Mentorship was a principle component that led to new teacher success and job satisfaction in the teacher induction processes explored in this literature review.

Having completed an extensive literature review, I was left to wonder whether a strong mentorship program can solely drive new teacher induction. The identified components for success, pedagogical and practical knowledge, and collegiality from a cohesive teacher network can be attained through a robust mentor-mentee relationship. Barriers such as mentor, mentee workload, mentor compensation, or release time, however, play a role in making such a program accessible to all new teachers.

Informed by the literature, this research study considers whether support needs to be formally structured, such as programs in Alberta, Ontario, and Delta, B.C., what forms it needs

to take, and how and where a mentorship program fits into the induction process. This research study provided the interviewed new teachers an opportunity to share their vital firsthand experiences with and perspectives on mentorship.

Defining the Question

The number of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years varies within the surveyed literature, falling between 20% to 50% (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2017). Teacher onboarding currently requires attention as "teacher attrition within the first five years of classroom in-service practice is a concern on a global level" (Majocha et al., 2019, p. 591). Besides being a global concern, teacher attrition is a school-wide concern as it affects more than just the new teacher. Research suggests it is most often young teachers who have recently graduated from a university-level teacher preparation program and experience "praxis shock" –a mismatched experience when expectations of professional life do not align with the realities experienced working within the profession" (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020). New teachers pick up unfavourable habits without any support to intervene and adjust them, inhibiting students' learning (Baker-Gardner, 2015; Clandinin et al., 2012). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), "[t]here is a growing consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor in determining a student's performance is the quality of his or her teachers" (p. 2). Where student success is hindered by teacher unpreparedness and attrition due to a lack of support, the question becomes: what should be included in a new teacher induction program to support a successful transition into the profession, who should partake, and at what level? The overarching method for supporting early career teachers (ECTs) as they navigate the management of their classrooms for the first time is through some form of a new teacher induction program. This research study focused on hearing about new teachers' experiences with

onboarding and what they identified as gaps or barriers to a successful transition to teaching in their classrooms. Reviewing the teacher-centered literature led me to define my research question to focus on the efficacy of induction processes that lead to combatting high attrition.

Methodology

Seven new teachers participated in this research study; their teaching experiences are highlighted in the table below.

Table 1

Participant pseudonyms and teaching experience details

Participant Name	Teaching Experience
"Aiden"	Second-year teacher. Taught in the same school both years. Worked in a familiar school with established professional relationships. Classroom teacher in Year 1. In Year 2, took on a non-enrolling position within a specialty program[ii] to stay in the same school. Participated in the district mentoring program with his practicum teacher.
"Olivia"	Second-year teacher. First year was as a classroom teacher in her practicum school (where she had also done previous volunteer work) with a lot of support and established professional relationships. In Year 2, started in a specialty program which evolved into a split grade classroom teacher position.

	Participated in the district mentorship program with the other teacher teaching the same grade within her school.
“Darcy”	Second-year teacher Was hired as a Teacher on Call (TOC) a few months before graduating from a teacher education program. She had a temporary position in a split classroom in her first full year. In Year 2, she is in the same school, teaching the same grade as year one. Did not partake in the district mentorship program.
“Melanie”	Second-year teacher. In Year 1, she was in a contract position teaching part-time with a teaching partner who had over 20 years of teaching experience. She was a TOC on the days that she was not in her contract classroom. In her second year, she continued in the same contract, teaching a split-level classroom while being a TOC. Partook in the district mentorship program by attending all meetings but was never paired with a mentor.
“Amaya”	First-year teacher. She held many different support roles within the education space before being hired into her first teaching contract position. Her position was in a specialty program teaching a split grade level. Did not partake in the district mentorship program.
“Razia”	Third-year teacher.

	The first two years were in a school with supportive staff and administration. In her third year, she was in a new school with less support than her previous school. All years were as a classroom teacher in a 'choice school.' Partook in the district mentorship program with a teacher from her school.
"Nav"	She started with the district as a Teacher on Call (TOC) and was also hired into a temporary classroom position on a part-time basis. She then moved on to being a non-enrolling teacher between two different schools. Her position during this study was that of a non-enrolling teacher, sharing her time between a new school and a school she worked in the previous year. Did not partake in the mentorship program.

This research was conducted using a constructivist paradigmatic approach to ensure each teacher's perceptions of their onboarding process and experiences were heard. The ontological stance that guided my research is that multiple realities can describe the same phenomenon. By interviewing seven teachers, the intent was to receive a broad representation of individual experiences that could ultimately contribute to the research inquiry. Though teachers may have gone through a similar onboarding process within their district, their backgrounds and experiences shaped what they needed and took away from the phenomenon. The seven interviewed teachers were able to provide this breadth of experiences. Teachers' stories and experiences are unique to their situation and interpretation. The epistemological frame of this study is that participants need to have a relationship with the interviewer to be comfortable and confident when sharing personal stories and experiences. This belief shaped the research design to keep the participants' feelings and perceptions in mind. The semi-structured interview format

allowed me to address specific dimensions of my research question while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the inquiry (Galletta, 2013). The interview approach allowed participants to share the parts of their stories that they deemed as necessary, rather than being guided into only sharing specific elements of their holistic stories. Phenomenological interviews were used because "the type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

Participants were reminded of the confidentiality protocols that were being followed through transparency to conduct the research and by sharing how I would disseminate the data to benefit other new teachers like themselves. This transparency allowed me to build and maintain a rapport with participants to feel more comfortable trusting me with their perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By disclosing that I was a new teacher, I created a bond over a shared commonality. However, I did not share my personal history with onboarding as I wanted to bracket my own experiences as much as possible so as not to allow them to obstruct the research process. I used a research journal to note my thoughts and experiences; this allowed me to value them without impeding the research. After receiving ethics approval (See Appendix A), I used the phenomenological research approach to explore and develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon of onboarding as experienced by several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Sources

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. An intentional sample of teachers to best inform the research problem under examination was used for the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To align with the research objectives of the study, participants had to be teachers that met the following criteria: (a) within their first three years in a contract position; (b) working

in the specified school district, situated in the Lower Fraser Valley region of British Columbia, Canada; (c) were elementary (Kindergarten-grade 5) teachers during their onboarding; and (d) participated in some form of onboarding during their first three years as a contract teacher.

Because I had a specific sample population that I wanted to target, I reached out to the district's Human Resources department about whether they had an email distribution list that met my sample criteria. This specific district was able to compile and share the list so that the Invitation to Participate would be sent only to the desired population. In doing so, I minimized the chances of others to influence a new teacher to volunteer to share ideas on their behalf or for new teachers to feel obligated to participate if a more senior teacher suggested that they do so. I sent the Invitation to Participate via email, clarifying the research question and asking eight volunteers to participate in the study. Interested participants were asked to email directly to receive the Letter of Informed Consent. I planned to arrange virtual one-on-one interviews with the first eight interested participants that returned the letter; however, out of the twelve interested participants who responded to the Invitation to Participate, only seven sent back the Letter of Informed Consent. Therefore, those seven teachers became my sample population. Virtual one-on-one interviews were scheduled upon receipt of each signed Letter of Informed Consent.

Data Tools

Virtual interviews became necessary as the COVID-19 global pandemic prevented in-person meetings. Interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams[iii] software platform. The interviews were video recorded in Microsoft Teams and audio recorded using Otter.ai[iv] with participant consent. As the approved online meeting software for this specific district, Microsoft Teams was a familiar and easily accessible platform. Otter produced a written transcription and audio recording of the interview. Both platforms were used in conjunction with one another to

minimize technical errors that could have resulted in lost data. Participants were asked to dedicate no more than 120 minutes to the research process—60 minutes to respond to the initial email invitation, provide consent, and complete and return the member check of the interview transcript, and up to 60 minutes for the one-on-one interview. Each interview consisted of open and semi-open questions that allowed participants to share their phenomenological experiences. Using open-ended questions did not guide the participant in a specific direction with their answers but allowed them to share what was most meaningful to them about what was being asked.

One-on-one interviews were conducted allowing me, as the Principal Investigator, to hear each participant's story and follow up with questions specific to their experiences. In-depth understandings of each teacher's story could not have been heard in a manageable way if the interviews were conducted in a group setting. Once interviews were completed, Otter.ai transcriptions were reviewed for any apparent mistakes made by the application. The transcripts were anonymized entirely by replacing all names with pseudonyms and then sent back to the participants for member checks within seven days. The member check allowed the participant to review the transcript and add, remove or change anything before it was used for analysis. Participants were given seven days to complete the member check and email back amendments or final approval. Acceptance was assumed and transcripts were used for analysis if I did not hear back from the participant—as clearly stated in the Letter of Informed Consent, in the interview, and in the email sent out with the transcript. Once interview transcripts were member checked, the Microsoft Teams recording and Otter.ai transcript and audio files were deleted from their respective applications. The only files containing the member-checked transcripts were kept on a password-protected computer.

Data Analysis

The member-checked interview transcripts were coded to establish themes around new teacher onboarding experiences and support. During the interviews, I conducted "pre-coding" (Layder, 1998, p. 4) by jotting down key terms and concepts to remind myself to look back and consider when doing the post-member check organizing of data. These notations were made on the printout of the questions I had with me when conducting the interviews—each was labelled with a unique participant number. The same pre-coding was done for each participant during their individual interviews.

In addition, I endeavoured to bracket my own experiences with onboarding to minimize follow-up questions during the interviews that revealed my own biases and opinions. Using a notebook as a bracketing journal, I took time before interviewing to write down my thoughts and experiences. Being aware of my experiences allowed me to validate and understand them before putting them aside and focusing on the participants' experiences. My Supervisor validated my experiences but reminded me to stay curious when conducting my research, as this would help me draw out what the participants had to say. Coming into each interview with a curious mindset helped me focus on the research question.

For data analysis, I used Excel to organize coding. The Excel workbook's first tab contained the research question, goals, and objectives. I referred to this tab as needed to keep my coding decisions focused (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Subsequent tabs were labelled with each participant's pseudonym and dedicated to their particular data. Each tab contained a table with the following columns:

- direct quote
- location in transcript

- *in-vivo* code
- category

As member-checked transcripts came in, I printed them out and highlighted words and quotes that spoke to the original research question, resulting in direct quotes as first-level codes. These were narrowed down by pulling out the succinct and accurate meanings into *in vivo* codes. *In-vivo* codes also allowed me "to keep the data rooted in the participants' own language" (Saldana, 2009, p. 6) and value their voice by working with the terms used by the participants themselves (Saldana, 2009).

The second level coding process organized the *in-vivo codes into* the following categories:

- New teachers' definitions of onboarding
- Feelings surrounding the transition to a contract teaching position
- Who was involved in the onboarding process and where it takes place
- District mentorship program participation
- Needed improvements or missing elements in the onboarding experience
- What successful onboarding entails

An example of the first and second-level coding process is displayed using a screenshot of the Excel spreadsheet below:

Figure 1

First and Second-level Coding

Location in Transcript	Direct Quote	In Vivo Code	Category
Page 2 (4:17)	A lot of us at the orientation had a lot of questions, we left a little bit unsatisfied with the orientation, it was really broad and it felt unrelated to what we really wanted to know.	"a lot of questions" "left a bit unsatisfied" "really broad" "felt unrelated to what we really wanted to know"	New teachers' definitions of onboarding
Page 5 (10:50)	I feel like I still have questions with TOCing, its one of those things that I have learned as I've gone along.	"I still have questions" "Ive learned as I have gone along"	Needed improvements or missing elements in the onboarding experience

Each Excel table was then sorted by “category” to assess code prevalence. I used focused coding to search for the most frequent or significant categories in the data corpus and then decided which initial codes made the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006). Any outliers or one-off codes were not entirely discarded but put into their own category.

I used third-level coding to merge all the data into one space and narrow down even further. I recreated this table in a new tab and added a column titled “pseudonym” to know which quote belonged to which participant and one titled “Category 2.” I referred to my original research question and objectives and identified significant themes within each category that spoke directly to those objectives to create the second category of themes:

- Organizational practices
- Teaching practice
- Professional relationships
- Shared experiences
- Relevance
- Accessibility

These themes were the significant result of this study. An example of the third-level coding is displayed using a screenshot of the Excel spreadsheet below:

Figure 2

Example of Coding Process

Pseudonym	Location in Transcript	Direct Quote	In Vivo Code	Category	Category 2
Melanie	Page 2 (4:17)	A lot of us at the orientation had a lot of questions, we left a little bit unsatisfied with the orientation, it was really broad and it felt unrelated to what we really wanted to know.	"a lot of questions" "left a bit unsatisfied" "really broad" "felt unrelated to what we really wanted to know"	New teachers' definitions of onboarding	Organizational Practice
Melanie	Page 5 (10:50)	I feel like I still have questions with TOCing, its one of those things that I have learned as I've gone along	"I still have questions" "Ive learned as I have gone along"	Needed improvements or missing elements in the onboarding experience	Shared Experiences

When all levels of coding were complete for all seven interviews, I shared the codes, categories, and resultant themes with my Supervisor; as Saldana (2009) states, "sometimes we need an outside pair of eyes or ears to respond to our work in progress" (p. 190). During the data analysis phase, I worked with my Supervisor to ensure that I was not getting lost in the data but rather staying focused on the research objectives. After data analysis was completed, I began writing the findings.

Managing Bias

To strengthen the validity of this phenomenological research study and manage bias that could affect analysis, I used bracketing to "set aside personal experiences as much as possible to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). Second, I worked closely with my supervisor to review my interview questions and data to get an outsider's perspective as "[a]nother researcher is often much quicker to see where and how you are being misled" (Huberman et al., 2014, p. 298). I wanted to ensure my biases or experiences were minimized in my interview tools. Third, member checks ensured that everything participants wanted to share was included in the transcripts for data analysis and would not be misinterpreted or misrepresented. The study's intentions were reviewed with participants (Huberman et al., 2014) by sharing the research study's objectives and plans for dissemination in the Letter of Informed Consent. By keeping my research question, goals, and

objectives physically in front of me, I avoided a tendency to "wander too far from them to follow alluring leads or drop them in the face of a more dramatic or momentous event" (Huberman et al., 2014, p. 298).

Participant bias was minimized using a district-approved platform that participants were familiar with and could access. Participation was made accessible to any interested participant by using Microsoft Teams to conduct the interviews, and not excluding anyone based on their access to the interview platform. Virtual interviews also minimized participant bias by eliminating the need to travel to participate in the interview.

Strength of Study

Denzin & Lincoln's (2005) triple crisis model was followed closely to ensure participant representation, legitimization, and praxis were evident in this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the representation crisis as the qualitative researcher not capturing lived experiences directly but creating them in the written text. Because of the phenomenological nature of this study, representation was essential. I stayed as true as possible to the teachers for participant authentication when sharing their stories and experiences. During the interview process, participants were asked to share a preferred pseudonym and describe how they would like their teaching experience and background to be shared. Using their chosen descriptors and anonymizing them with pseudonyms, thick descriptions were provided to make their stories real and relatable.

Legitimization, referring to "validity, generalization, and reliability" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19), was achieved by explaining my analysis as transparently as possible and sharing all data tools in the appendix. Direct quotes from participants communicated their stories in their own words. Finally, by investigating my research question through a phenomenological research

approach, I intended to generate new insights around the design of onboarding programs to address new teachers' diverse professional needs and conceptions of 'success' targeting the praxis crisis by sharing immediate value in the study and use of the findings.

Results

This study aimed to answer the initial research questions through authentic new teacher stories. I was honored to be able to listen to them share their experiences so passionately while at the same time coming to realizations around elements of their onboarding experience that they "never really thought of before" (Nav) because the experience is such a "whirlwind" (Darcy). I interviewed seven new elementary school teachers and immersed myself in their stories through the interview transcripts.

Defining Onboarding Through New Teachers' Lived Experiences

The seven interviewed teachers had slightly varying definitions of the term onboarding. Each teacher's definition of what they understood of onboarding was based on their own experiences or what they wished their experience entailed. Aiden and Darcy, both second-year teachers, shared definitions like that of Castetter and Young (2000), who state that "induction as a systemic organizational effort for helping personnel adjust readily and effectively to new work assignments" (as cited in Baker-Gardner, 2015, p. 44). Aiden described onboarding as "kind of like orientation when you show up somewhere new and learn about the logistical items, where things are, how to get things, and what the protocols are." Similarly, Darcy felt it was "getting someone ready for the job…giving them the lay of the land, letting them know about resources available, letting them know about the school or the district before they start actually working." Their definitions were based on what they felt should have happened rather than their realities.

However, other interviewed teachers, such as Olivia, felt that onboarding is based more around professional relationships. She believed that it is "how I feel as a new teacher in a school building, or how I was welcomed and how well I fit into the school community." As a non-enrolling teacher,[v] Nav also spoke to the professional relationships that made a difference for her as a new teacher starting her career in a new school. From the beginning, her school principal saved space for her in staff meetings to speak about the specialized program she ran in the school. This gesture was a welcome contrast to her experience in her previous school, where she was never formally introduced to the staff and felt as though no one knew her. She worked hard to form those professional relationships on her own by doing things like "trying to go in the staff room to eat my lunch, just to try to be part of it."

Amaya and Nav, who taught in specialized programs within the district, mentioned their interviews as significant components of their onboarding experiences. In fact, for Amaya, "[her] first thought about onboarding [was] around the interview process." With few offerings at the district level for onboarding, it was understandable why the interview was mentioned. The first point of district contact for new teachers was through the hiring interview. There was no further formal district lead follow-up in many cases, leaving the interview to be interpreted as the onboarding process. Amaya was hired during the COVID-19 global pandemic; therefore, her interview did not involve an interviewer. Instead, she was asked to record herself answering the preset interview questions on video and then submit them back to the district. She described that she ended up receiving considerable support from those in her school building after her impersonal experiences starting the role without speaking to an actual, welcoming individual. Contrary to Amaya, Nav's interview was conducted by "the kindest person whose warmth helped me realize that this is the place I would want to work and for this district…that is what I

think of as onboarding, interview, and the green light, and I am in." Their comments suggest that the interview is an essential component of onboarding, and in the case of Nav, the interview swayed her decision to join the district.

Melanie was an eager new teacher who went out of her way to take in as much learning as she could. However, she was not always presented with the best outcomes despite her efforts. She was the only participant who indicated attending a district-run formal orientation session held at an offsite district location. Although she was happy to be able to attend a formal orientation, she said that "a lot of us at the orientation had a lot of questions, we left a little bit unsatisfied with the orientation, it was really broad, and it felt unrelated to what we really wanted to know." It was disheartening to hear her explain that:

> "I was actually looking for a second orientation, but then I was thinking oh I guess I wouldn't get anything further from it…I wasn't offered anything quite like that, but I hoped that maybe somehow someone would reach out to me or there'd be something sent to me with more details…things just iron out after a while, I guess, but I still had a lot of questions."

This led to her adopting the mindset that finding her way was just part of a teacher's professional experience: "We didn't really know where to direct our questions, but we were like you know what, we'll figure it out as we go, that's the profession, really." Melanie was not the only teacher that felt to 'figure it out as we go' was just part of the teaching profession. When asked what she thought of when she heard the term "onboarding," she replied it reminded her of boarding transportation. Others shared a similar concerning mindset as they described starting in the profession like "being thrown to the wolves" (Nav) or onboarding as "boarding a ship" (Razia). These definitions are concerning as boarding a ship usually involves an individual directing the

passenger where to go or where things are located then leaving them alone. These definitions align with the more significant onboarding stories that these teachers lived.

Without the mindset that you should be set up to begin your new career with the proper support in place or have had a personal experience where you were guided by beginning a new career, the term onboarding can be tough to define. Darcy had no onboarding experience, being hired while still a student in a teacher preparation program. This led to her criticism of the district's as-needed hiring practice. "At the district level," Darcy stated, "I am not sure if I really know what onboarding looked like because I was still a student, and they hired me to be as a TOC, and they basically asked, 'when can you start?'" Considering Darcy's experience within the context of new teacher attrition, a visible cycle will not be broken until time is invested into onboarding, which may promote teacher retention and positively affect staffing problems.

The definitions shared by participants came from their own experiences and the support or lack of support they were presented with. It is essential to hear the stories of these teachers to understand how they felt during the early stages of starting their positions and how these feelings contributed to the telling of the stories of their onboarding journeys.

"In Over My Head": Initial Feelings of New Teachers

For this phenomenological study, it was essential to understand that each component of the individual stories influenced other components. For example, the onboarding experience affected how the teachers felt in their new roles. A significant component of these new teachers' stories was how they described feeling when they first started their positions. The word "burden" came up multiple times during the interviews. The teachers felt that asking questions would burden or bother the experienced teachers within their schools. By seeing themselves as a 'burden,' they refrained from asking questions and tried to find their way independently. This

took time and did not provide them with reassurance or confidence in their abilities, ultimately affecting their students as this came through in their teaching practice. Olivia shared, “I do not feel like I am showing that confidence to my students,” as the lack of support left her “flustered” at times. Without support making it appropriate to ask questions, new teacher Darcy did not want to be a bother and “was staying [at school] probably until seven o'clock during the first two weeks of September.” She spent her time locating resources or planning lessons from scratch. The late hours led to tears and feelings of overwhelm or being “in over my head.” Aiden shared Darcy’s feelings around the amount of time needed to create and locate resources on his own, stating “I think a lot of time was wasted trying to find good materials or good programs to base our instruction off of.” In contrast, the experienced teachers at Olivia’s first school offered to share and teach her what she needed. “For me as a new teacher, that felt really good,” she described, “because I did not feel like I was burdening somebody or I was not bothering them, they would go through everything, so that was really helpful for me.” By having dedicated individuals within schools willing and able to onboard new teachers, new teachers can potentially build professional relationships quickly and lose the fear of burdening individuals, resulting in them asking more questions and more quickly establishing their teaching practice.

New teachers did not feel comfortable asking questions because they feared looking “incompetent” or as if they “do not know what [they were] doing” (Darcy) in front of their administrators or fellow teaching staff. Melanie struggled with treating an experienced teaching partner whom she valued as a resource. Not wanting to compromise their professional relationship, and with a fear of looking incompetent, she turned to district sites and did her best in navigating her way on her own. “I want us to have a professional relationship,” Melanie explained, “where she can rely on me to do well and not be concerned and have any doubt in her

mind that I cannot do it right." When there is not someone to turn to with questions and build confidence, teaching can be an "isolating" career. At Aiden's school, the new teachers formed their own group where they supported one another, shared resources, and talked through struggles together. Forming peer groups can be a way for schools with multiple new teachers to contribute to the new teacher onboarding experience. Hearing about how others can affect the way new teachers feel during their onboarding period, the question becomes who was involved in onboarding?

The Faces and Places of Onboarding

The Teacher across the Hall

Recalling their onboarding experiences, new teachers shared that the individuals within their school buildings contributed most to their success. One of the most significant resources was the experienced teacher within the school teaching the same grade. With an array of grades within an elementary school, teachers teaching the same grade shared everyday experiences. These teachers served as easily accessible, relevant resources by being in the same school. For Darcy, the other teacher in the same grade was able to help with issues like "classroom management skills…home reading program…how to set up the desks…and the daily routine." Olivia, Melanie, and Amaya described the other teacher in the same grade as an invaluable resource for their onboarding process.

Similarly, "the teacher across the hall" was often mentioned because of how easily accessible they were. Rather than finding the correct person at a district level to direct their questions towards and then waiting for an answer, teachers within the school building provided answers in real-time. Follow up was also much easier when it was face to face, as Melanie found out when she tried to direct her questions to someone outside of the school building:

> "There has never really been a place where I could go direct my questions, I have had questions in the past, and I have sent them to the district. I got a reply saying, let me transfer you to someone else, and then they transferred me to someone else that can answer my question. The answer never really came, so I do not know what happened. After that situation, I was like, you know what, I guess I cannot send my questions anywhere; I just have to find the answers myself."

Aiden also found that an in-school resource worked better for him than trying to access the district level support options:

> "I tried all the district sites, but I found it too overwhelming, and trying to sift through it all was too much, so I would rather hear it straight from someone. To me, it is one thing to find a resource, but it is another to talk to someone who has actually used it and implemented it."

As the new teachers built professional relationships, they became more comfortable with the other staff in the school. Teachers in the school were familiar with local demographics and school community and had an understanding and familiarity with the school's organizational practices. "The people here know our kids," explained Aiden. "[I]f I was to receive help from someone who is across town, or up the mountain, they are not going to have the same experiences at school that we are having here." For Razia, the teacher across the hall was "[her] first point of contact, especially because she had just taught all of my students last year…so I definitely went to her a lot." The non-enrolling teachers in the school were helpful for Olivia, Darcy and Nav as they introduced them to resources and ideas through collaboration and co-teaching. Because they were in the same school, the non-enrolling teachers could come into their

classrooms and teach lessons while the new teachers observed and took notes on strategies and lesson ideas.

A large part of Aiden's support came from the peer group that the new teachers in his school had formed and how they would get together after school to share experiences and resources. In contrast, Melanie was the only new teacher in her school when she started, so "there were no other new teachers really to bounce ideas off of, or even ask questions, or connect with on how to do report cards or something like that, and I did not want to burden anyone else with my concern." She turned to the district-run mentoring program to connect with other new teachers.

The School Administrator

The role of the School Administrator was mentioned in all interviews, whether it was because the administrator was helpful in a successful onboarding experience or the new teacher wished that the administrator was more present and involved. Five of the seven interviewed teachers shared that their administrators were very helpful. They offered advice or assistance, helped with classroom preparation or access to resources, provided them with school tours, liaised introductions between school staff, or fully supported their teacher autonomy. Nav's school administrator did something that no one else mentioned: she integrated her into the entire school community by announcing her addition to the staff in the school newsletter and carved time out in staff meetings for her to speak about her specialized program. By welcoming her in the school newsletter and putting her program on the staff meeting agenda as a standing item, Nav's administrator's simple actions acclimated her to the entire school. She further reflected,

> "…it really gave me a sense of, like, my colleagues are listening, and I could talk to everybody if there was something I needed to bring up, so she always from the

> beginning, did that, that made me feel like a part of the school right away, and it also made my colleagues aware, without me having to do all the legwork. That was really nice now that I think about it."

Olivia's administrator helped facilitate the classroom setup in September and made herself available to Olivia when she needed anything. By doing this, she helped set her up for success from the beginning. Reflecting, Olivia thought, "it seems crazy to say that in my first year, but I did feel really prepared." She felt more prepared in her first year than her second. Though the administrator at her second school was very supportive, she guided him by explaining where she needed support rather than him providing that support on his own. Much like Nav, she was doing the "legwork." The other two teachers kept a distance from their administrators at first, admitting, "I did not want my administrator to think that I am totally incompetent and that I did not know what I am doing, but I really know" (Darcy). Unless the administrator puts the effort in to form a relationship and open their door to the new teacher, they can be an intimidating presence. Melanie recalled:

> "[I] was scared to talk to my principal in the first year just because she was the principal and I [felt] intimidated, she is my boss, and I want her to think I am doing a good job. I do not want her to think I do not know what I am doing."

The reality, as Darcy shared, is that new teachers often "do not know what they are doing" and need a place to share this and receive support rather than be left on their own to figure it out with little guidance.

Support from Outside of School

Five of the interviewed teachers shared that their primary source of onboarding support were people they already knew before entering their contract position. These included their

teacher mentors or professors from a teacher education program, or friends and family members who were also teachers. Building professional relationships took time for these new teachers; they relied on people they already knew and had relationships with during their beginning stages. Razia's family member, who taught in the same district, provided her with books to build a classroom library for her students. He also provided her with a table for her students since she did not have enough seating for the entire class and was left to fend for herself, with the lack of administrator support, when trying to provide adequate seating for her students.

The clerical staff was also necessary for Darcy and Amaya when they began as TOCs with the district. As Darcy explained: "As a TOC walking into a brand-new school, they are the first person you see." Amaya recalled:

> "Usually, it was the secretary that would help me the most. You get to the school, and they are the first face you see, and then they give you your keys, and they tell you where your classroom is, and they give you your folder."

By looking at who was involved in the onboarding experience, it is evident that professional relationships were vital for success. Building those relationships, however, took time. In a few cases, the administration's actions sped the process up and contributed to the successful onboarding experiences of the new teachers. Professional relationships allowed new teachers to ask questions without feeling like a burden or a bother. "I cannot emphasize enough how important it was for me, especially in my first year, to have such a good crew around me," Razia reflected. These real teacher examples point to participants driving successful onboarding.

Proximity and accessibility were essential factors for the new teachers when finding support. Could these same support measures be put in place if the onboarding took place in an off-site location or involved district-level mentors and teachers?

"It Was Not the Program That Helped Me": Mentorship Experiences

The only district-run onboarding feature that all seven teachers spoke to was the district's mentoring program. Though they were all aware of the program being offered, only four of the seven teachers engaged in it. An internal webpage for the program claims that it provides new teachers with professional relationships that make a difference in the teachers' professional practice. Both were significant areas of importance for new teachers when they talked about success in their early careers. The following table indicates whether the interviewed new teachers participated in the district-run mentorship program and, if so, who their mentor was.

Table 2

The extent of involvement in the district mentorship program

Participant Name	Participation and Mentor
Aiden	Yes Mentor: Teacher Mentor from practicum
Olivia	Yes Mentor: A teacher teaching the same grade in her school
Darcy	No
Melanie	Yes Mentor: Though she attended all the meetings, she was never assigned a mentor
Amaya	No
Razia	Yes Mentor: Teacher teaching in her school

Nav	No	

The teachers that were involved in the mentorship program chose their mentors (i.e., no one was paired with a mentor through the district).

As the above table shows, the teachers that participated in the mentorship program did so with mentors with whom they were already comfortable and had previous relationships. Mentors were either teacher mentors from a teacher preparation program or teachers from their respective schools. While further research would need to be done to understand how strict the program is in terms of structure and overseeing the mentor-mentee relationships, this study's findings lean towards this being a semi-formal program as teachers shared about choosing their mentors and not attending all the meetings. However, this would need to be confirmed with further research around this specific program.

Comments about the district-run mentorship program were focused on the mentor and not around the program itself. For example, Olivia commented, "I think the mentorship program was nice because of the mentor that I had." It was not the program that provided these teachers with a professional relationship that affected their teaching practice as stated in the program marketing; it was the mentees the teachers selected on their own. "It was not the program that helped me, it was the mentor I had, but the mentor was only there because we were in the same building," Olivia explained.

The new teachers' stories suggested that the program needed adjustments to support their needs better. Being the only new teacher in her school, Melanie wanted a network of new teachers to share experiences with and turned to the program to find a peer network and support person. She thought this would "solve some of [her] problems." However, she was never paired

with a mentor. She did have a relationship with her teaching partner but only saw her virtually (as their teaching days did not align):

> "I went to all the meetings, and I followed up a couple of times like, I still have not got a mentor, have you found anyone, and a few times she was like oh yeah we are still looking or like did not get back to me. So, the whole year I went to all the things, but I had no mentor beside me. It was kind of sad, so I went there, and everyone had their mentors, and I was just there. It was sad because I was really engaged, I was really disciplined in being there, and I really want to grow, so it was too bad."

Melanie's dedication to doing well was echoed in all the teachers' stories. Each new teacher expressed a desire to want to do well and learn as much as possible to enhance their own teaching practice by learning from more experienced teachers in the field. They accomplished this by maintaining relationships with teachers they were comfortable looking vulnerable in front of or proactively engaging in the mentorship program.

Along with professional relationships, easy access to a mentor proved to be an essential contributing factor to new teacher success. Going to their mentors with quick questions made a difference for the teachers. Amaya mentioned: "there is not enough time to have those conversations in the mentoring program. If you see someone every two months, two months is a lot of time in a school." Meetings were held at an off-site location to ensure they were accessible to everyone in the district. However, while trying to ensure accessibility, the opposite was happening. Olivia and Aiden expressed concern with having to leave school to arrive at an external location on time, on their own time, and how that was counterproductive to having mentoring meetings in their school with someone who was already in the building:

> "I do not know how practical it would have been to have a mentor that was not in my school because then I would have to go out of my way, and they would have to go out of their way to find time to collaborate." (Olivia)

Aiden echoed this thought, stating:

> "I think just the fact that most of ours was in the building and like actually with the people that we work with because I feel like, had I been required to go down to a district site, or something to do these kinds of things then I have to rush myself right out of here to get down there."

With the suggestions made to enhance the program and the positive emphasis placed on the mentors, this research concluded that new teachers could benefit from in-school mentor support without the caveat of a formal district-run program.

Playing "Catch-up": The Hinderances of (Un)timely Onboarding

It is important to understand what new teachers suggest can be done to improve current onboarding practices. Several of the teachers spoke about preservice teacher education and what could have been improved to set them up for success before they even started their careers. The seven interviewed teachers did not graduate from the same university program; however, their comments somewhat aligned. One of the concerns presented with the programs was that as student teachers, the new teachers began their practicum component after the school year had already started. By coming into their practicum classroom after it had already been set up and the routines established, new teachers missed out on being involved in those critical initial components. There was more of an emphasis on lesson and unit plans than on the other elements that new teachers need to be aware of when settling into a classroom of their own. Olivia captured this common experience when she shared that:

> "I think that because in our practicums, we are not shown the behind the scenes of it all, we are just kind of given this is the unit that you are teaching, you can plan however you want, and go ahead and teach, and create your lessons."

By not being fully aware of or knowledgeable about everything that goes into establishing a classroom, new teachers felt they had to "play catch-up" for the first few months while learning and preparing so many things at the same time.

Along with the learning curve, a hinderance to new teacher success, as mentioned above, was the lack of resources. When trying to set up their classrooms, the new teachers had to gather teaching resources, furniture, and supplies to make their classrooms functional. When Aiden and Razia described the state of their classrooms in September, they mentioned walking into a "room full of garbage" (Aiden) or a classroom with "not enough desks for students" (Razia). The lack of resources and learning how to build a well-designed classroom without having seen this before make September and the summer months (if the teacher is hired early enough to have the summer months to prepare) before starting the school year a hectic and challenging time for new teachers. In contrast to a classroom with a lack of student seating, at her previous school, Razia's administrative team "bought stuff for [her] empty classroom," helping her start the year with one less thing to worry about in September.

Another factor that was mentioned as a hindrance to their success was that many new teachers were hired with little to no time to prepare their classrooms before they were fully responsible for students' learning. The 'as needed' hiring practices in this district might fulfill their pressing needs to have a teacher in the classroom; however, the practice makes more work for new teachers as they have no time to prepare. One morning, Amaya arrived at her practicum school as a TOC when she received an email to start her new contract position. She took

attendance, said goodbye to her students, and went off that same morning to begin her contract. Darcy and Melanie were hired while still students in their respective teacher preparation programs. With practices like these in place and in the face of significant teacher attrition rates, how is it that the district's and new teachers' needs can be adequately met?

All teachers talked about report cards as a pain point with an extreme lack of resources available to complete such an important and tedious task. As Olivia recounted:

> "Report cards are such a big thing for teachers, we have to get them done, and they are a part of the students' files, but it was not really shown to us. Where do we get them from? How do we write them, what sorts of things do we include in them? Everything is so different from district to district, school to school. I think if we had more information on these things that it would have made my experience a lot smoother."

The teachers all mentioned utilizing support from experienced teachers when completing report cards. It was a "scary" task that teachers had no option but to complete correctly. "I think the hardest part with report cards was the confidence part," Darcy explained, "and how I would justify why I gave the student the mark that I did if an admin or parent comes and talks to you about it." Teachers were to complete the report cards with no formal training and send them home with the confidence and ability to defend anything that may be disagreed upon by a parent or administrator. Teachers were left to "fend for themselves" in many different scenarios, even with such crucial elements as report cards. Some tasks, such as completing report cards in the district-approved format, are impossible to learn without support. This study found that support was strongly linked to professional relationships for new teachers.

Professional relationships are a significant contributing factor to new teacher success as the relationships provide support on many levels. A lack of relationships can be a considerable

hinderance to new teacher success. Razia mentioned that in her school, the "administrators or other teachers do not have time to spend helping new teachers at the beginning of the year." Without those relationships, new teachers may not have someone they are comfortable going to and asking questions, nor do they have a network that could help them assimilate to the school culture. New teachers are often left feeling they need to "fend for yourself" (Nav). With the proper onboarding supports, these hinderances might be avoided, and new teachers can be set up more effectively for success.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore ECTs' lived experiences of onboarding in order to address issues that were raised in the literature around attrition, competency, and most importantly, support. In defining experiences in their own words, participants presented a constellation of issues related to feeling supported through their early years. The questions asked in this research study ultimately aimed to inform the overarching inquiry of what successful onboarding looks like for new teachers and how this can be achieved to tackle attrition. The table below displays elements that contribute to new teacher success, along with the themes that emerged. The themes build off one another to describe successful onboarding.

Table 3

Summary of Results by Theme

Theme	Contribution to Success Onboarding
Professional relationships/collegiality	• Professional relationships enabled new teachers to ask questions, locate resources, and seek support appropriately

	and comfortably. Through professional relationships, new teachers acclimated to their new environment much more quickly, allowing them to focus on developing their teaching practice rather than on finding their place within the school community. Professional relationships took the form of peer networks, in-school collegial support, and administrative support. Professional relationships were the catalyst for new teacher success throughout this study.
Organizational Practices	• Teachers appreciated being versed in the organizational practices for their specific school and district. The new teachers shared gratitude for being taught simple tasks (e.g., using the photocopier, school assembly schedule and protocols, roles of the support staff in the building, and how to access their support) to more complex tasks such as writing report cards. These were items that some had tried learning about through district sites and resources but were unable to discover in a timely and helpful way. They also shared that it was more beneficial to learn about organizational practices from experienced colleagues well-versed in operational logistics.
Developing Teaching Practice	• New teachers felt their time was being utilized to "find their place" within the schools when it could have been better spent

	developing their practices. New teachers wanted to learn and absorb as much knowledge as possible; they did this by partaking in professional development opportunities, enrolling in the mentorship program, and spending time planning and locating resources. The new teachers were grateful when grade-appropriate resources were proactively shared with them. Though they learned through having to navigate their way through their early careers, the process could have been more productive and less time-consuming if a support network was in place.
Shared experiences	• Several teachers spoke to the importance of having colleagues within their school to learn from. They worked closely with the other teacher teaching the same grade or the teacher down the hall because they could share experiences around student demographics and the school community's needs. The shared experiences made their knowledge and support valuable and applicable to the new teachers.
Relevance	• The support that new teachers required and valued the most was from colleagues who could relate to them, whether through teaching the same grade or being in the same school. If support was coming from outside the school, it was not as helpful or relevant to the new teachers' immediate needs

	when starting in the profession. As new teachers developing their practices and setting up their classrooms, the support they needed was specific and could best be obtained from a colleague who shared practical experiences.
Accessibility	• Access to resources such as year plans or grade-appropriate materials was appreciated or wanted by the new teachers. Without having these resources shared with them, new teachers found they were spending a lot of time locating and creating these materials. Accessibility also referred to collegial support; new teachers preferred having this support available to them in person in their schools, rather than locating it and, in some cases, having to travel to see and speak to someone. It was easier to "pop in next door" because some concerns, like student behaviour, needed to be addressed immediately.

The results of this study indicate that onboarding needs to be a fluid in-school process with room to adjust based on the needs of the new teacher. There was little evidence that presented a need for teachers to be engaged in onboarding at a district level; however, district support could and possibly should guide the in-school processes. These ideas are supported by the emergent themes that arose in the findings.

The most dominant theme throughout the study was the need for professional relationships/collegiality. Without these relationships, new teachers faced the added challenge of

finding and negotiating a place of their own in the school's existing organization (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2002). Through the new teachers' stories of the support they had or wished they had, it was evident that all elements of successful onboarding were reliant on support from colleagues. Ideally, support came from a colleague that the new teacher felt comfortable with and who they did not feel they were "bothering" or "burdening." These findings were inconsistent with the studied literature that claimed support for teachers – in particular, the provision of well-structured formal support – is critical during these early years, contributing to both early-career teacher job satisfaction and to retention within the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The interviewed teachers preferred the opposite, as they felt most supported when the support was informal. Most did not take full advantage of the formal mentoring support available in their district. There was no mention of formal support being helpful. Instead, they instead attributed their success to support being: 1) individual and informal, 2) relevant (teacher teaching the same grade or in the same school), and 3) accessible (walking into their classroom, as opposed to going to a "meeting across town," or formally scheduling every interaction).

The district offered a formal mentorship program that none of the interviewed teachers took full advantage of. Though they did not partake in the program to its fullest, they did engage in a mentor-mentee relationship in a more informal context. The new teachers' appreciation for this mentorship is consistent with Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) claim that mentoring is more vital than other factors in preventing attrition. However, such benefits may only be present when mentors are partnered carefully, and the mentoring program is structured to ensure quality (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; DeAngelis et al., 2013; Hallam et al., 2012). Rather than having a mentor assigned to them through the program, teachers who engaged in the

mentorship program did so with teachers with whom they were comfortable and had previous relationships. The partnering in these teachers' cases was intentional and careful because they chose their mentors themselves. Olivia sharing that "the mentorship program was nice because of the mentor I had," suggested that the perfect match of mentor-mentee can create the ideal support scenario. The teachers talked about the program meetings being held off-site and covering topics that were irrelevant to them, which stopped them from attending, resulting in these teachers taking advantage of mentoring, however, informally. The new teachers jumped into the mentoring component rather than the relationship-building piece that needs to come before mentorship. Because the teachers had the relationships established, they used their mentors to their advantage by going to them with specific questions and issues that pertained to their situations. The interviewed teachers knew their struggles, and with an established professional relationship, they were comfortable asking their mentors for assistance in these areas. The research findings also highlight that the location of the chosen mentor was within the school that the teacher worked, an indication that accessibility to the mentor is an essential aspect of the mentor/mentee relationship for the new teachers. The teachers did not want to travel to a distant location to meet with their mentors and found that being able to "pop in" to a classroom or ask for assistance when needed was important. An aim of this study was to assess to what extent participation in the district mentorship program was instrumental in new teacher onboarding success. Evidence was obtained that suggests professional relationships were vital. They allowed for mentor/mentee relationships and similar support; however, it was not the program nor the formal guidance teachers benefited from. Further research might be done around the definition of mentoring and whether it contributes to new teacher success or if any collegial relationship could do the same.

Professional relationships appeared in every interview as one of the main catalysts that propelled the new teachers' learning and abilities to develop successful teaching practices. Beginning teachers highly valued opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers, including non-enrolling teachers willing to come into their classrooms to teach lessons. Through their research, Clandin et al. (2012) found that "a low percentage of teachers surveyed said this type of support was offered" (p. 111) More opportunities for collaboration may be a possible solution to new teacher acclimation and onboarding as they would be learning to enhance their teaching practice while also forming professional relationships. Many of the interviewed teachers found themselves hanging onto the professional relationships they had formed while in their teacher education program because they did not have opportunities to form new ones without investing additional time and energy into the process. Over time, the teachers began building relationships with colleagues in their schools because they valued support from someone easily accessible who shared similar experiences. Over time, the relationships made with teachers in the schools became more relevant and replaced those out-of-school relationships that the new teachers initially held onto.

Alkins et al. (2007) argue that beginning teachers see learning with and from others as central to their professional growth. Daley et al. (2006) agree that mentoring and induction programs (collegial support) and more administrative support were associated with higher rates of retention of beginning teachers. By listening to the stories of the interviewed new teachers and how vital these professional relationships were, it is evident that there needs to be a school-wide practice for liaising these relationships for new teachers who join the school for them to form as soon as possible. Though the unique teacher experiences demonstrate the importance of 'loose' onboarding practices that can be adjusted to meet the needs of the new teachers, one component

of onboarding that seems to need to be consistent for all new teachers is the forming of relationships. When considering professional relationships as an essential piece of onboarding, the role of the administrators needs to be considered.

Research findings showed that teachers who had administrator support gained confidence in their teaching practices sooner than those that lacked this support and had to "fend for themselves." Carboni et al. (2007) argue principal leadership is instrumental for mentoring and teacher retention. Administrator involvement also diminished some of the fear that two teachers shared when looking incompetent in front of their administrators. After they formed relationships with their administrators, the fear of being judged disappeared, and administrators were seen as more of a resource than an authoritative figure to be feared.

As some of the interviewed teachers shared, their administrators appeared continually busy and were unable to provide the needed support. This is where a distributed leadership model might make a difference; rather than receiving no support, a delegated staff member can provide that support on behalf of the administrator. Though peer and administrative support are not the same and both are needed for new teachers to form the important relationships with both parties, some support is better than none. The question remains though: who are administrators choosing to distribute leadership abilities to? Are the relationships that they are forming between mentor-mentee meaningful and purposeful or are they choosing teachers to help them carry out their own school goals through passing on similar values to the new teacher? Moreover, are they knowledgeable enough about their staff to create these support networks?

Gonyou-Brown and Pollock's (2017) analogy of the administrator as the roadside assistance dispatcher echoes with the findings of this study; they describe the administrator as someone who has traveled the road before and serves as the connector or guide for the new

teacher to reach their destination safely. As Nav had shared, her administrator introduced her to the stakeholders in the school community and provided her with the space to use those connections. She felt as though she had space and place within the school as others knew who she was and what her role was. The school administrator does not need to take on the onboarding solely. Administrators can lack the knowledge that they require to play a significant role in the onboarding of new teachers. Research around Jamaica's National Program for Teacher Induction Pilot Program determined principals themselves required a significant amount of support to run the induction program at a school level; they indicated a need for better supervision of the program from the ministry (George & Quamina-Aiyejina, 2003). Onboarding that fell largely on administrators led to a lack of pedagogical knowledge shared with new teachers.

Considering the positive experiences that some of the interviewed teachers had with their administrators and the type of support they were able to provide (e.g., providing space to speak in a staff meeting) along with the new teachers' overall preference for talking to colleagues who were easily accessible and could relate to their experiences indicates that school administrators have a role to play in the onboarding process; however, more stakeholders need to be involved in the process. Many factors need to be considered when determining the extent of the role that they play; perhaps, like onboarding, their role is also fluid and changes based on the administrator's experience, staff complement, and school culture? Much more work needs to be done before a complete understanding of the extent of the administrator's role is established.

Another important theme that emerged from teachers' stories was the importance of developing one's teaching practice to gain confidence. Teaching practice is initially learned in teacher preparation programs and then built upon once the teacher takes on their first teaching positions. The transition, however, was a pain point noted by some of the new teachers. There

was a significant disconnect between their expectations and reality when completing their teacher preparation programs and starting their career. The programs can only prepare new teachers so much as there are so many different classroom configurations and expectations based on the makeup of the school community and the needs of the students. The teachers felt that their respective programs failed to teach them the "behind the scenes" tasks that teachers must complete at the beginning of the school year. Such tasks involved creating a cohesive classroom environment with structure, appropriate resources, an established classroom management strategy, and physically setting up the space. By joining their practicum classroom after the school year had begun, they felt a sense of praxis shock when having to do this on their own. There was a "mismatch experienced when [their] expectations of professional life [did] not align with the realities experienced working within the profession…accompanied by a sense of disillusionment and disappointment" (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020, p. 2). Praxis shock was presented in this study in the form of lacking supplies, resources and, as Veenman (1984) puts it, "confronting a harsh reality" (p. 143). The realities faced by new teachers at the onset of their careers are tremendous. The lack of "behind the scenes" knowledge that teachers brought up in their stories provided a clear suggestion that teacher retention can start at the university teacher preparation level. Whereas past researchers have found that most teachers leaving the profession within the first five years are faced with praxis shock, Ballantyne & Retell (2020) show that this begins at the teacher preparation stage.

Resulting Recommendations

As a starting point for moving forward with new teacher onboarding support, I offer the following suggestions emerging from the three overarching areas of inquiry in this study:

- Onboarding needs to take place at the school level. Though district guidance would help streamline processes, it is in-school support that means the most to new teachers when starting their careers. Support from teachers in their own schools is often the most relevant and accessible, which is essential when seeking assistance.
- Mentorship is a critical component to onboarding; however, it is more the collegial relationships that impact new teacher success than a formal mentor-mentee relationship with program constraints. Collegial relationships propel the new teacher to feel included as part of the school culture while at the same time comfortable enough to reach out and seek support.
- Administrators play a significant role in the onboarding process. Though they can delegate more of the pedagogical tasks, their support needs to be made known so that new teachers are comfortable approaching them and not fearing their disapproval.

Limitations

This study was conducted amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic. Due to restrictions on social gatherings, the onboarding experience for teachers starting in a new school during this year may not align with what would have happened had it not been for pandemic restrictions. Many schools hosted meetings virtually, staggering teaching breaks, and restricting the number of staff members that could gather in staffrooms. These limitations may have slowed down and, in some cases, impeded the formation of support networks through the inability to form meaningful professional relationships with teachers that the new teachers could never see or meet. The pandemic also necessitated virtual meetings, which opened the study to participants who may not have otherwise had the ability to travel or dedicate more time.

Implications for Further Research

The praxis shock that the interviewed teachers discussed provides grounds for further research around what teacher preparation programs can do to minimize the disconnect between practicum experiences and the reality of a professional teaching position. As suggested by the interviewed teachers, perhaps a practicum that allows student teachers into the classrooms in September is one way of minimizing this shock by allowing teachers earlier exposure to the "behind the scenes" of setting up a new classroom. Further research could also be done around the definition of mentoring and whether it contributes to new teacher success or if any collegial relationship could do the same.

Conclusion

The teacher experiences presented in this research study were rich and encompassed many different perspectives. Though the stories that emerged were all unique, a common theme they highlighted was that new teachers' opinions and suggestions should be acknowledged when new teacher onboarding is being considered. Their lived experiences serve as invaluable resources for determining what contributes to new teacher success and attrition. Through their stories, the education field can become more knowledgeable and aware of what new teachers need to be successful and incorporate that into current onboarding practices. As a teacher leader, I will continue reaching out to new staff within my school to build supportive professional relationships and help them feel welcome. This is a small yet impactful gesture that can be a starting point for all teachers to contribute to the successful onboarding of their new colleagues.

[i] Choice schools in this district are Traditional Schools or Schools that offer French Immersion classrooms.
[ii] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this district created a specialty program which consisted of hybrid (in-class and virtual), and virtual (all on-line learning) classrooms.
[iii] See https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software/
[iv] See https://otter.ai/login
[v] In British Columbia a "non-enrolling teacher" is one who does not teach a set of students in a traditional classroom setting. Examples include, but are not limited to: Physical Education, Music, Library Learning Commons, English Language Learner Teachers.

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Appendix A

Ethics Approval Email

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Tel: (604) 557-4011
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Human Research Ethics Board - Certificate of Ethical Approval

HREB Protocol No: 100564
Principal Investigator: Mrs. Jennifer Manchanda
Team Members: Mrs. Jennifer Manchanda (Principal Investigator)
Ms. Anne Hales (Supervisor)
Dr. Sheryl MacMath (Course Instructor)

Title: Considering Early Career Teacher Onboarding Programs Through Story and Experience
Department: Faculty of Professional Studies\Teacher Education

Effective: December 16, 2020
Expiry: December 15, 2021

The Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) has reviewed and approved the ethics of the above research. The HREB is constituted and operated in accordance with the requirements of the UFV Policy on Human Research Ethics and the current Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2).

The approval is subject to the following conditions:
1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Approval is for one year. A Request for Renewal must be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date.
3. Modifications to the approved research must be submitted as an Amendment to be reviewed and approved by the HREB before the changes can be implemented. If the changes are substantial, a new request for approval must be sought. *****An exception can be made where the change is necessary to eliminate an immediate risk to participant(s) (TPCS2 Article 6.15). Such changes may be implemented

but must be reported to the HREB within 5 business days.
4. If an adverse incident occurs, an Adverse Incident Event form must be completed and submitted.
5. During the project period, the HREB must be notified of any issues that may have ethical implications.
***NEW** 6. A Final Report Event Form must be submitted to the HREB when the research is complete or terminated.

**Please submit your Research Continuity Plan to REGS@ufv.ca before beginning your research. The plan can be found here: https://www.ufv.ca/research/

Thank you, and all the best with your research.
UFV Human Research Ethics Board

****Do not reply to this email****

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Considering Early Career Teacher Onboarding Programs Through Story and Experience

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview about your onboarding experiences as a new contract elementary teacher in the [redacted] *District. Please remember you have the right to pass on any question that you are not comfortable commenting on and can withdraw your consent to partake in this research study at any time during the interview. Please be as detailed and honest as possible with your answers. Once we are done, I will send you a written transcript to read through and make any adjustments. Your identity will be completely anonymized in the final written paper as well as in any subsequent presentations and publications where the study may be shared.*

Can I confirm your consent to record the interview within Microsoft Teams and for me to record the audio within Otter? Otter is a separate application that I will run on my computer, and it will record the interview audio and transcribe everything as we speak. Remember that you will get a chance to read through the entire transcript and make any adjustments.

1. Can you tell me what you think of when you hear the term onboarding?

2. I am going to ask you about specific aspects of your onboarding experience.
    a. Who all was involved in your onboarding experience?
    b. How were/was the above-mentioned people or person involved in your onboarding?
    c. Where did it take place? (Please list all the places if there were multiple)
    d. How long was the process?
    e. Is there anything else you would like to share about your onboarding experience?

3. Did you partake in the district's mentoring program?
    a. If yes, how did you hear about the program?
    b. If yes, how did the program and your mentor(s) contribute to your onboarding experience?
    c. If no, why not?

4. Would you say that your onboarding experience helped set you up for success within your teaching role?
    a. What stood out to you as helpful in the onboarding experience(s) you had?
    b. What stood out as un-helpful or missing in the onboarding experience(s) you had?
    c. How did you get information that your onboarding experience may not have provided you with? (who did you go to? Did you look it up on district websites? etc.)

5. Do you have any questions or anything you wish to add before we conclude the interview?

6. Would you like me to email you a link to the final paper once the research study is complete?

Thank you for taking the time to partake in this research study. Your input is valued, and your confidentiality is of the utmost importance and will be maintained through anonymization of your responses. Do you have a preference for your pseudonym?

If any questions come up at all, please do not hesitate to email me anytime.
(Jennifer.manchanda@[redacted])