Supporting Early Career Teacher Learning: An Investigation into Induction Supports and Early Career Teacher Professional Learning in New Hampshire

Kathryn McCurdy

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Abstract
The past 20 years has seen a rise in the number of induction programs for beginning teachers, including those with mentoring. However, the way in which teacher education has been problematized is still calling into question the need for beginning teacher support. This dissertation study is situated in the belief that beginning teacher induction has positive impacts on such aspects of teachers’ lives including early career professional learning.

Situated in New Hampshire, this study utilized a qualitative multiple case study design that relied on participant interviews, researcher observations, and artifact analysis of three school districts’ mentoring programs. Findings from this study suggest that mentors and mentees believe that beginning teachers grow in both situative and cognitive domains. Three primary structures were identified that encourage novice teacher learning: mentoring, networks of colleagues, and principals. It was also identified that contextual factors such as strict adherence to the notion of teacher evaluation are impacting teacher learning and support. Recommendations are outlined for both practitioners and policy makers.

Keywords
early career teachers, professional learning of teachers, teacher learning, Education

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SUPPORTING EARLY CAREER TEACHER LEARNING:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO INDUCTION SUPPORTS AND EARLY CAREER TEACHER
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

BY

KATHRYN MCCURDY

Philosophy (BA), University of Kansas, 2004
Curriculum Development (MA), University of Michigan, 2005

DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education

May, 2016
This dissertation has been examined and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education by:

Dissertation Director, Thomas Schram, PhD
Associate Professor of Education

Joseph Onosko, PhD
Associate Professor of Education

Emilie Reagan, PhD
Assistant Professor of Education

Dianna Terrell, PhD
Assistant Professor Education, Saint Anselm College

R. Page Tompkins, EdD
Executive Director and Faculty, Upper Valley Educators Institute

On March 30, 2016

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.
DEDICATION

To all my past and present colleagues and students, thank you for embracing my learning, mistakes and all.

To Tom, thank you for the years of teaching, mentoring, and believing in me. Your trust in my abilities means the world.

To Elias, you are forever my joy.

To Michael, none of this would have been possible or even imaginable without you.

To my Mom, my first and favorite teacher…
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The past 20 years has seen a rise in the number of induction programs for beginning teachers, including those with mentoring. However, the way in which teacher education has been problematized is still calling into question the need for beginning teacher support. This dissertation study is situated in the belief that beginning teacher induction has positive impacts on such aspects of teachers’ lives including early career professional learning.

Situated in New Hampshire, this study utilized a qualitative multiple case study design that relied on participant interviews, researcher observations, and artifact analysis of three school districts’ mentoring programs. Findings from this study suggest that mentors and mentees believe that beginning teachers grow in both situative and cognitive domains. Three primary structures were identified that encourage novice teacher learning: mentoring, networks of colleagues, and principals. It was also identified that contextual factors such as strict adherence to the notion of teacher evaluation are impacting teacher learning and support.

Recommendations are outlined for both practitioners and policy makers.
CHAPTER 1. PROBLEMATIZING TEACHER LEARNING

The purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the relationships between early career teacher support and teacher learning. Specifically, I sought to:

• explore what early career teachers value and perceive as support for their learning and development;
• investigate why teachers perceive certain induction supports as contributing to their learning; and
• examine what and how teachers perceive they learn from induction supports.

In pursuit of these aims, I established two primary research questions:

1) What do beginning teachers value in an induction program as it contributes to their learning?
2) How do beginning teachers perceive certain induction components as helpful to their learning?

In the following sections, I will first provide a brief background about the history of research and thinking about teacher learning. Second, I will outline a statement of the problem as it relates to notions of teacher learning. Third, I will situate my study in relation to the problem statement. Finally, I will provide a brief synopsis of each chapter.
Research on Teacher Learning: Why Ought We Care About the Support of Early Career Teachers?

Research into how teachers learn is a relatively new field of inquiry when compared to other traditions of education research (Zeichner, 1999). This is perhaps because to some, “teaching and teacher education were practices about which people held commonsense or folk theories and from which little in the way of complexity was expected” (Florio-Ruane, 2002, p. 208). In the 1980s, the American Educational Research Association officially recognized scholarship in teacher education and preparation as a distinct, viable, and critical element of education research by creating a separate division in the association dedicated to such research (Zeichner, 1999). Since then, a body of research has been building devoted to turning the lens of education research on itself and investigating such topics as the optimal structure of pre-service teaching programs and early career teacher support. This recognition of scholarship in teacher education and preparation was significant because it indicated a shift in the way that the education community conceptualized teacher learning.

In much of the literature prior to the 1980s, teacher learning was understood as an outcome or a by-product of student learning (Reiman & Thies - Sprinthall, 1998), likely due to the influence of the field of psychology on the history of education research in general that emphasized the study of the child and child development. Research about teacher preparation in general and how teachers learn in particular was considered to be more of a variable in studies about student achievement rather than a topic to be investigated directly. However, the belief was beginning to emerge that the learning of teachers was distinct enough from the learning of children that conclusions about one could not be universally applied to the other because how teachers learn has its own knowledge base that is distinguishable from other fields (Cochran-
Smith M. , 2004). At the same time that teacher education research was becoming a separate body of literature and line of scholarship, there were two other lines of research that were emerging and would eventually become linked. The first was reports about the shortage of teachers, and the second was research into the support, in particular mentoring, of early career teachers.

Historically the teacher shortage was framed as a supply or recruitment issue in which schools of education were simply not graduating enough teachers to fill the nation’s classrooms (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Recently, however, researchers have begun to reframe the problem as a crisis of teacher retention, believing that there are enough graduating teachers, but teachers are not staying in the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). This new outlook is the result of several studies’ findings that nearly half of all new teachers leave the profession within their first 3 years of teaching (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Some estimates calculate the cost of replacing a teacher up to $10,000 (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Smith T. , 2007). Besides the high cost of recruiting new teachers, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) argue that a ‘revolving door’ is being created in classrooms that experience constant teacher turnover, and the real crisis that this is causing is one of teaching quality. If we accept the premise that good teaching requires practice, it would stand to reason that it takes years to become a masterful teaching. However, if teachers are leaving teaching in the first few years of entering the profession, this means that teachers are leaving the classrooms prior to the likelihood of reaching their full potential as teachers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

More recent reports from the United States Department of Education (Gray, Taie, & O'Rear, 2015) suggest that higher numbers of teachers are remaining in the teaching profession.
The authors argue that, on average, closer to 80% of teachers who began teaching during the 2007 – 2008 school year have remained in the profession. However, this number is lower for teachers who were not assigned a mentor or teach in schools with reduced resources, suggesting that there is differentiated access to more veteran teachers. Ultimately what this means is that certain students are being taught by a continuous string of inexperienced teachers with emerging skills. By focusing on the retention of teachers and providing induction support opportunities, several studies conclude that there is a positive relationship between a teacher’s participation in an induction program and the student achievement of that teacher (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This finding has become of particular interest because the success of teachers and schools is now starting to be directly linked to their students’ test scores through new initiatives such as teacher evaluations and schools needing to meet Annual Yearly Progress according to the No Child Left Behind law (Haertel, 2013). In this way, the education community as well as politicians have become interested in the implications of the revolving door of teachers.

One way that districts and schools have sought to address the retention crisis of teachers is by offering induction support, particularly through mentoring structures (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Mentoring has been used for many purposes such as helping new teachers transition from the role of the student at a university to the role of a full time teaching professional, socializing new teachers to a school building or district, as well as offering a point person (the mentor) who can assist with questions about curriculum and instruction. One of the rationales for providing mentors for early career teachers is to alleviate the isolation and frustration that beginning teachers feel because, as Feiman-Nemser (2012, p. 119) argues, “new teachers have two jobs – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach. No matter how good a pre-service program
may be, there are some things that can only be learned on the job”. If teachers feel more successful in their craft, they are likely to remain in teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

While mentoring remains the primary vehicle of early career teacher support and is arguably invaluable to new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), in recent years, the tone of teacher support has shifted in two important ways. First, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) published a study that organized teacher support into several categories, where each category had an increasing amount of support structures. What the authors found was that, although mentoring was indeed key to teacher retention, teachers who were offered more supports were more likely to remain teaching and be more satisfied with their career choices (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

This suggests that although historically many districts have relied upon mentoring to induct new teachers into the profession, other a comprehensive induction program that includes such supports as time to collaborate with colleagues, having a shared workspace, and availability of a support and resource network should not be ignored and instead should be valued for their role in supporting teacher transition from that of a student to a full time professional.

A second way in which the tone of teacher support has shifted in recent years is the notion that teachers ought to be given support in their beginning years of teaching not just as a means to retain them as teachers but also as a way to pay attention to their development as learners of teaching. Learning to teach does not end upon graduation from a pre-service preparation program, but is part of a what Feiman-Nemser has argued is a continuum of learning to teach, of which pre-service and early career phases are both distinct stages (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Admittedly, the pre-service phase of learning to teach is a time of intense saturation of material that is critical to knowing how to teach such as building up content and pedagogical knowledge (Wang & Odell, 2002) as well as develop deep understandings of child development
and other education coursework aimed at teaching activities like curriculum development, differentiated learning, and assessing student learning. However, one study speculated that many teachers leave teaching in the first few years of their career because they believe they are not ready for the job even after completing formal, university preparation programs (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). A second study followed the experiences of teachers who left after their first year of teaching, and participants expressed several reasons for leaving including problems with classroom management coupled with unsupportive administration (Gonzalez & Brown, 2008). What the findings from this study suggest is that beginning teachers still need assistance in their development as effective classroom instructors, but if schools are not or cannot be attentive and responsive to those needs, teachers may choose to leave the profession.

The findings of these two studies support the notion that participants, specifically, and beginning teachers, in general, had difficulty rectifying the differences in and knowing how to apply their pre-service experience with those experiences of full time teaching. Feiman-Nemser argues that “no matter how good a pre-service program may be, there are some things that can only be learned on the job” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 119). Districts have begun taking up the responsibility of continuing teacher development by offering beginning teachers support structures such as mentoring or more comprehensive induction programs. There is not always clear guidance on the meaning of support or what support is actually helpful to teachers, and this leave districts asking such questions as what kind of support? For whom? How long? To what end?

Although districts may offer such support structures from a practical recruitment perspective of keeping costs down by retaining teachers and helping to improve the instructional quality of such teachers, perhaps a more fundamental reason for why we ought to care about the
support of early career teachers is that the induction phase, often defined as the first three years of teaching, is also a time of learning for teachers, and when organized and implemented well, induction programs are able to contribute to the continued learning of teachers (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Cook, 2011; Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Feiman-Nemser has dedicated much research over the past 25 years arguing for the paradigm of early career teacher support to be understood not just through the lens of teacher retention but also through the mindset of seeing teachers as learners. The body of her work suggests that learning to teach “continues afterwards on the job” (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1995, p. 2). By offering induction support, we are doing right by teachers by giving individuals every potential to become a successful educator.

Statement of the Problem

The problem in which my study is embedded is twofold. The first aspect of the problem involves issues surrounding why and in what ways beginning teachers struggle with professional tasks, particularly in their first few years of teaching. The second and related aspect of the problem is the way in which the professional growth of beginning teachers is perceived, attended to, and taken up by their school environments. The research aims and subsequent research questions of this study are situated primarily in the latter concerns although it is necessary to attend to the related first set of issues as a means to develop the context and “problematize” the idea of teacher learning.
Situating this Study within the “Problem” of Teacher Learning

In response to what has been called the teacher retention crisis, many states and local school districts have begun initiatives to address the needs of beginning teachers (Cherian, 2007). Most of these initiatives are in the form of an induction or mentoring program. Research is emerging that addresses how such programs are related to teacher retention, job satisfaction, teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Wang & Odell, 2002; Curran & Goldrick, 2002). This study is situated in the background and context of teacher assistance in that it aims to contribute an additional perspective on reasons for beginning teacher support: the “problem” of teacher learning. As such, a critical assumption of this work is that teacher learning is active before, during, and after the university preparation component. This study also begins from the perspective argued for and shared by previous research that beginning teacher supports are both positively important and impactful.

This study takes up the problem statement by focusing on the problem of teacher learning as the outcome of beginning teacher support structures. In other words, this study seeks to understand the ways in which schools and districts perceive the needs of beginning teacher growth and how this influences the design of induction or mentoring program and structures. As such, teacher learning is situated at the center of this study, but it also differs from previous literature in the following ways. First, whereas previous literature has looked at generally first year teachers, this proposed study hopes to add to the literature about early career teaching learning by investigating the shift in what teachers across all years of the induction phase (first through third year teachers) are focusing on, thinking about, or changing practices in. McCormack’s (2006) study nicely links first year teachers’ self-reported learning with their perceptions of the helpfulness of aspects of induction support contributing to that learning,
particularly along Feiman-Nemser’s (2012) central tasks of learning to teach. However, it may be the case that what a first year teaching finds helpful in their development will be different than what a third year teacher considers helpful. A second difference of this proposed study is that it intends to use a case study approach that includes multiple sources of data, including perspectives of teacher assistors (mentors and principals).

To date, there have been two important lines of research around early career teacher learning: studies that measure teacher retention as it relates to induction supports and studies that investigate the impact of mentoring on teacher learning. However, what appears to be missing is a study that joins these two traditions together examining how a more comprehensive understanding of induction that goes beyond studying a singular support contributes to early career teacher learning. This case study ultimately became a case study of mentoring, as it followed the mentoring programs of three different districts, but it was also discovered that there were multiple supports embedded within each program that offered insights into how beginning teacher professional learning was attended to.

This is a time in education in the United States of increasing demands on students, teachers, administrators, and the faculty of schools of education, and these demands are costly. Many districts are able to offer mentoring to their beginning teachers as the primary mode of induction, but the cost to supply one year of mentor support to a teacher is estimated between $500 and $3,500 (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010) whereas the cost to replace a teacher who leaves the profession is estimated at nearly twice that amount (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). Although some districts offer comprehensive induction programs, many districts overlook or do not utilize other forms of induction support that could be beneficial in conjunction with mentoring to promote early career teacher learning. This study hopes to contribute to a practical understanding of the
needs of beginning teachers by making recommendations based on the findings about more comprehensive ways that districts can support teacher learning.

**Outline of Chapters**

In Chapter 2 I will present a review of the literature around teacher induction, teacher support structures, and teacher learning. Then I will present a framework and theories of adult development and teacher learning in which this study will be embedded and framed.

In Chapter 3 I will outline a theoretical orientation for the study as a means to introduce the methodology of this study as well as the actual methods and procedures used. It will also describe the methodological approach as well as the analytical methods used.

In Chapter 4 I will present a discussion of the findings. This chapter will present the historical context of the mentoring and induction in the state of New Hampshire, introduce the three cases participating in the study, and put forth an interpretation of findings around categories of novice teacher professional learning and structures that encourage such growth.

In Chapter 5 I will develop an argument around possible limitations of the support structures analyzed in this study as well as outline recommendations for mentoring programs following from the findings. Limitations of the study will also be discussed.
Understanding Teachers as Learners

As it is the intention of this study to investigate topics about adult learning, it is important to outline what is meant by learning and what can act as evidence of learning within the context of early career teachers’ lives. Daloz (1999) describes for a concept of learning in which “development is more than simply change. The word implies direction” (Daloz, 1999, p. 23). For Daloz, learning is a transformation through which one becomes able to “redefine and understand in a radically new way the meaning of the world they once knew” (Daloz, 1999, p. 27). Learning, then, can be conceptualized as the ability to see actions, behaviors, interactions, and situations in more complex ways than before. Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) argue that adults ought to be perceived as learners because they show an increased capacity with “inductive reasoning, spatial ability, and verbal ability” (40), supporting the understanding of learning described by Daloz. While learning represents a change in the world view or beliefs of a person, learning can also be evidenced by changes in behavior (Reiman & Thies - Sprinthall, 1998). For the purposes of this study, learning will be conceptualized as a change in beliefs, perspectives, world views, or behavior of an individual.

When we begin to talk about teachers as learners, we must ask ourselves two fundamental questions: what kind of learning we are speaking of and where that learning takes place. A prospective teacher’s interactions with schooling, teaching, learning, and education do not begin at the university when that individual decides to enter teaching. Rather, every person who later becomes a teacher began their formal interactions with school when they entered kindergarten, and from that point on, that person was making observations and judgments about
teachers, teaching, schools, and what it means to learn. In other words, what it means to learn to teach has been growing in teachers’ minds for decades before they become teachers. For these reasons, two prominent writers in the field of teacher education, Deborah Britzman and Sharon Feiman-Nemser, posit that when one learns to teach actually occurs through one’s own experiences with schooling, long before as well as long after an individual enters and finishes a formal teacher preparation program.

Britzman (2010) argues that:

the biggest problem for education is that we grow up in school, just like we grow up in family, and that kind of education is a rather unconscious one. People enter into formal education with very strong ideas about what a teacher is and does, what a learner is and does (443).

This sentiment is echoed by Feiman-Nemser and Remillard who write that “the influence of schooling is especially strong. Future teachers spend thousands of hours in elementary and secondary school watching what teachers do and developing images about and dispositions toward teaching” (1995, 3). In later research, Feiman-Nemser outlines her belief that there are four distinct phases when learning to teach: pre-training, pre-service, induction, and in-service, and these phases embody and appreciate the full continuum of learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). In the pre-training phase of learning to teach, Feiman-Nemser includes all of the memories and impressions of school that teachers have created and then carried throughout the years prior to beginning any formal pre-service program.

None of the aforementioned researchers, however, argue that one’s experiences as a student restrict an individual to become a certain kind of teacher or understand learning in a singular way. Instead, what is important is that the role of experience in learning to teach be
given due attention at each phase and there is deliberate recognition by prospective teachers and teacher educators that teachers come to their teacher preparation programs full of preconceived notions and feelings about teaching and learning. What is most critical here is not to quash these impressions of teaching and learning held by prospective teachers but rather to 1) acknowledge that these preconceptions exist, 2) recognize that these impressions of teaching run deep in a person’s being and are often intertwined with issues of their identity, and 3) have a rich understanding of how to properly teach prospective teachers to reflect on their notions of teaching and learning and “place” them within more formal understandings of teaching and learning.

The notion of experience is key to understanding and contextualizing teacher learning because it impacts the beliefs and mannerisms of individuals. During the pre-service and induction phases of learning to teach, experience remains a critical driver in teacher learning because a person is being intentionally situated within different contexts to create thoughtful challenges as a means to encourage and stimulate learning. Likely the most recognized period when a great deal of teacher learning occurs is during their formal preparation program (pre-service). Admittedly, this is a time of intense saturation of material that is critical to knowing how to teach such as building up content and pedagogical knowledge (Wang & Odell, 2002) as well as develop deep understandings of child development and other education coursework aimed at teaching activities like curriculum development, differentiated learning, and assessing student learning. In the pre-service phase of teacher learning, individuals often engage in a combination of coursework and student teaching that form the bulk of their situated experiences that are meant to address how one learns to teach. Experience in the pre-service phase intends to support good habits of mind and good habits of teaching. Universities understand the
importance of experience in learning to teach and many now offer yearlong internships, in part, as a way to allow pre-service teachers the most similar teaching environment to that of full time teaching (Abrams & Andrew, 2010).

As teachers transition from being a student of teaching to being a teacher of students, new teachers may no longer be involved in coursework, but they still find themselves in practical situations that extends beyond their current bank of understanding how to address. In other words, beginning teachers are still making sense of their classroom but often without the benefit of assistance from a university supervisor or cooperating teacher, and the demands of full time teaching are no less than those encountered during the pre-service. Several studies have investigated the challenges that new teachers report. First, the mental and emotional transition from being a student of teaching to teaching itself is difficult (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006). Instead of being a guest in someone else’s classroom during one’s student teaching internship, a new teacher is now responsible for his or her own classroom, and some teachers find this shift isolating (Britzman, 1986; Womack-Wynne, Dees, Leech, LaPlant, Brockmeier, & Gibson, 2011) and sometimes the logistical structures of schools do not make it possible to collaborate and ask for help. Another part of the difficulty of transitioning to full time teaching is how to apply the material from university courses (that are often criticized for being too theoretical in nature) to the actual learning of students (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006; Wang & Odell, 2002).

Beginning teachers continue to have unique professional experiences that they need to make sense of as well as learn about and from in order to not only feel successful as educators but be a successful educator. There are two theories of development that will serve as the foundation in this proposed study for conceptualizing the conditions necessary for adult learning.
The first is Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Development theories involving ZPD have typically been to describe the growth of children, but adult development theorists have recently built upon Vygotsky’s theory as a lens for thinking about learning.

The current problem in the educational environment, as it pertains to teacher learning, is threefold. First, there is not a solid understanding what new teachers are learning in their early careers of teaching. This contributes then to the second problem: school districts are primarily in the business of student learning and, as willing as some may be to contribute to teacher learning, do not always know how to take on the role of teacher educator. Lastly, the tone of the prevailing narrative of teacher induction suggests that teachers need support in their early years of teaching because they or their abilities are somehow deficient. Wong (2005) reports, however, that many other countries (eg. Switzerland, New Zealand, China, and Japan) take seriously teacher induction not because the individual is deficient or unfit to be a teacher, but rather the view about what is involved in learning to teach necessarily includes teacher induction.

Two theorists, Alan Reiman and Lois Thies-Sпрinthall (1998), introduced a notion similar to that of ZPD called Support and Challenge that was primarily and specifically intended to describe the conditions under which teachers learn. Reiman and Thies-Sпрinthall argue that there are five conditions necessary for teacher development: role taking, reflection, balance, continuity, and support and challenge. As the authors outline, each of the five conditions interact and depend on one another in an iterative manner. For example, a person may be placed in a
new, more complex role (role taking), and in order to successfully navigate this new role, “the person would need to construct new thoughts and behavior to meet the new demands” (Reiman & Thies - Sprinthall, 1998, p. 72). To accomplish the task of constructing new thoughts or behaviors (a challenge), an individual will need sufficient and appropriate guidance from a more experienced person (support). However, in order to assist the individual with understanding why they adopted new thoughts and behaviors or to determine which thoughts and behaviors are more helpful than others, individuals must also engage in reflection. Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall argue that “cycles of action and reflection need to be balanced to promote effective interplay” (1998, p. 73). Allowing too much time to pass between times of reflection could mean that important learning opportunities were missed. The final condition, continuity, refers to the needs of adult learners to have an appropriate amount of time to engage in an activity sufficient for learning to occur. As the authors argue “at least one semester is needed for significant structural growth to occur” (Reiman & Thies - Sprinthall, 1998, p. 73), which counters the one day workshop approach taken by many involved in teacher staff development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Although the focus of this dissertation study is to examine teacher learning in early career teachers, it is important to understand how experience plays such a fundamental role in learning to teach at each of Feiman-Nemser’s phases. We begin to see that because experience is so key to learning to teach, what takes place in a new teacher’s classroom is equally important to a lasting understanding of teaching and learning as what takes place in pre-service coursework. This suggests that where teachers learn to teach occurs in multiple contexts, including on the job.
as full time teachers. The next section will address research as it pertains to beliefs about what teachers learn.

**Early Career Teacher Learning**

When speaking about induction, Feiman-Nemser argues that there are multiple meanings that can work together to understand a more complete picture of teacher development and support but can, at times, become conflated and work to undermine the goals of induction (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). The use of the term induction, according to Feiman-Nemser (2012) falls generally into three categories: “a process of socialization” (152), “a formal program for beginning teachers” (152), and “a unique phase in learning to teach” (151). Research treats the induction phase in a teacher’s life as being anywhere from just the first year to the first three years of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). For the purposes of this study, I am most concerned with the latter two meanings of induction because the focus of the study is meant to better understand the teacher learning that occurs as part of a formalized (or informal) program of teacher support that takes place during the first three years.

If I am to argue that learning to teach continues into one’s teaching career, it is important to understand what kind of learning researchers are speaking of and how this may be distinct from teacher learning at other phases of teacher development. Feiman-Nemser argues that findings from her research have illuminated differences between cognitive pre-occupations of pre-service and early career teachers, and at each of the four stages of teacher development (pre-training, pre-service, induction, and professional development), there are distinct “tasks” upon which teachers are developmentally capable of being focused. She has developed a framework that captures this in her *central tasks of learning to teach* (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Feiman-
Nemser identifies six tasks for learning for teachers in the induction (early career) phase:
gaining local knowledge of students, curriculum, and school contexts; designing responsive
curriculum and instruction; enacting a beginning repertoire in purposeful ways; creating a
classroom learning community; developing a professional identify; and learning in and from
practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

In Figure 1 below, the central tasks of learning to teach are outlined for the second
through fourth of Feiman-Nemser’s phases of teaching (pre-service through continued
professional development). It is important to note that the tasks at each stage share similar
themes, suggesting that there is a continuity of what is important for teachers to learn and be able
to do.

**Figure 1: Central Tasks of Learning to Teach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of Teacher</th>
<th>Description of Central Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preservice</strong></td>
<td>• Examine beliefs critically in relation to vision of good teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop subject matter knowledge for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop an understanding of learners, learning, and issues of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop a beginning repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop the tools and dispositions to study teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Induction</strong></td>
<td>• Learn the context – students, curriculum, school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Design responsive instructional program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create a classroom learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enact a beginning repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop a professional identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuing Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>• Extend and deepen subject matter knowledge for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Extend and refine repertoire in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strengthen skill and dispositions to study and improve teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expand responsibilities and develop leadership skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 143)*
This study focused on the five components of the induction column of learning tasks as well as one more outlined by Feiman-Nemser, and therefore it is necessary for each of the tasks to be elaborated upon. Feiman-Nemser argues that “new teachers have two jobs – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach” (2012, p. 119) because a large part of learning to teach requires novice teachers to “learn what the expected goals and outcomes are for students at their grade level and what materials and resources are available. They need to understand how these expectations fit into the larger school or departmental curriculum and how they related to district, state, and national standards and testing” (2012, p. 121). In addition to learning about the school, novice teachers must also become familiar with their specific students. Not only does this help teachers understand the context of their school and its community, by becoming familiar with their students, teachers are able to design curriculum that is responsive and “make decisions about what and how to teach over time and then make adjustments in response to what happens” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 121).

One of the ways that novice teachers often respond to the difficulties of their new role is by retreating back into habits that do not reflect what their pre-service preparation has articulated as good teaching. One of the challenges of induction, then, is to support teachers to enact the vision of good teaching with respect to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. New teacher induction programs must help “new teachers enact these approaches purposefully with their students by developing the necessary understanding and flexibility of responses” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 121).

The fourth central task of learning teach for novice teachers is to create a classroom learning community. This task includes a “wide range of responsibilities from setting up the physical environment and establishing rules and routines, to promoting cooperation, managing
disruptions, and teaching democratic processes and problem solving” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 122). Feiman-Nemser argues that this task is critical to novices because having a sense of control in the classroom allows new teachers to feel as though they can teach in ways that promote higher order, complex thinking. However, this task is complicated by an individual’s development of her teaching identity, and the fifth central task, and nervousness of how her classroom is perceived by outsiders and how they may judge her teaching ability. Feiman-Nemser writes that “beginning teachers struggle to reconcile images of their role” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 122) often vacillating between an authoritarian figure and nurturing caregiver as they attempt to negotiate their own images of teachers and who they believe themselves to be.

The final central task of learning to teach during the induction phase is to help teachers learn in and from practice. Similar to Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s (1998) reflection component of their teacher development framework, this task of learning teach focuses on a teacher’s ability to problematize their learning and put to question what is confusing or puzzling. Feiman-Nemser argues that in order to accomplish this, “novices need opportunities to talk with others about their teaching, to analyze their students’ work, to examine problems, and to consider alternative explanations and actions” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 123).

Feiman-Nemser aligns her theory of early career teacher learning with two other bodies of thought about the cognitive weight of the first years of teaching. First is the notion that beginning teachers “rely on trial and error to work out strategies that help them survive” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 119). This often means that teachers will continue to enact behaviors that have served them well even if the action contradicts what they may have learned about good teaching in a pre-service program. At times, teachers may also regress back to behaviors based on assumptions of teaching and learning experienced in their own schooling. A second body of
thinking is that beginning teachers must resolve “concerns about acceptance, control, and adequacy” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 119) before that individual is able to dedicate energy to thinking about higher levels of their own as well as their students’ learning. The central tasks of teaching framework is not incompatible with these two bodies of thought but rather view them as an incomplete picture of how complex teacher thinking and learning is during the induction phase.

In a 2006 study conducted in Australia, authors McCormack, Gore, and Thomas used Feiman-Nemser’s central tasks of learning framework to investigate the experiences of first year teachers (McCormak, Gore, & Thomas, 2006). Participants were given semi-structured prompts for journals around the central tasks of teaching and asked to record their experiences. The authors found that across multiple dimensions of the tasks of teaching for beginning teachers there was a shift in the content of what teachers were writing. For example, the authors note that in the beginning of the first year of teaching, participants would reflect on how difficult it was to design responsive curriculum because they did not know their students and were more preoccupied with management. However, teachers’ reflections include much more discussion about creating curriculum for differing ability levels and using different instruction towards the end of the year.

Remembering that McCormack, et al’s (2006) study was conceptually structured around Feiman-Nemer’s central tasks of teaching, the study did not necessarily highlight new bodies of teacher learning during the early career years. Rather, the findings do suggest two important ideas about teachers as learners in their beginning years. First, the content of what teachers were writing about shifted over the course of the year. This suggests that the way they were experiencing their classroom, their surroundings, and their role was changing. Whether or not
they were enacting changes of mind and behavior that was of good quality was not directly studied, but this shift indicates that teachers were reacting to and interacting with their environment in ways that indicate learning. Second, because there was evidence of change in teacher thinking across the central tasks of teaching, the study supports Feiman-Nemser’s framework as a viable and meaningful way to conceptualize what are important areas for teacher learning in the induction phase.

While Feiman-Nemser presents a conceptual argument for ways in which teachers grow and categories of learning, a working definition of teacher learner is still necessary to ground what may be evidence of the construct teacher learning. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) present a definition for conceptualizing teacher learning that both supports this study’s research questions as well as complements and enhances the conceptual framework put forth. Described in further detail below, a working definition for teacher learning is posited to be a growth or change in practice or knowledge.

A fundamental assumption of this theoretical framework, from Feiman-Nemser’s work, is that teachers are presumed to be learners. Using Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s of teacher knowledge, this represents the domain of learning in practice, where teachers are also reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983). I will return to this notion of reflective practitioners. A second fundamental assumption of my framework comes from Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s (1998) work where they posit that teacher development occurs when 5 interacting conditions are present. Here, I am specifically using the word ‘development’ as it is what the authors use. I will, however, align my definition of teacher learning with that of Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s teacher development.
I move forward now to my definition of teacher learning. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) outline 6 different perspectives on teacher change, one of which is that change can be seen as growth or learning. In this perspective, “teachers change inevitably through professional activity… and teachers are themselves learners who work in a learning community” (948). In the Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) perspective of change expounded here, change is seen as the outcome of growth or learning, and growth and learning are seen as synonymous. What this suggests is that change is taken as evidence of learning. I argue that a definition for teacher learning, then, is some kind of growth or change in an individual.

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) also argue that we must be attentive to what kind of theory of learning we adopt because this can drive not only what counts as learning but also what evidence of that learning looks like. They outline two theories: situative or cognitive theories of learning. In a situative theory of learning, “teacher growth is constituted through the evolving practices of the teacher, which are iteratively refined through a process of enaction and reflection” (955). This theory of learning aligns with the notion that the professional context of learning to teach can be understood through an apprenticeship model. A cognitive perspective on learning to teach shifts the focus of growth from that of teacher practice to one of teacher knowledge (e.g. Shulman, 1987) where “growth becomes a process of the construction of a variety of knowledge types (content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge)” (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, 955).

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) posit that we ought not see situative and cognitive theories of learning as being a dichotomous choice or at different ends of a learning spectrum because they can be mapped onto the same model of teacher learning, the Interconnected Model (Figure 2). Instead, they argue that learning can and should be perceived as both a change in
teacher practice (situative) and knowledge (cognitive) where the two theories are interconnected and iterative rather than linear and dichotomous.

**Figure 2: The Interconnected Model of Professional Growth**

![Interconnected Model of Professional Growth](image)

*Source: (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, 951)*

**Connections Between Teacher Support and Teacher Learning**

Much of the research on the connections between early career teacher support and teacher learning is written from the conceptual perspective of adult development theories such as Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory or Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s notion of challenge and support (Reiman & Thies - Sprinthall, 1998). Either in response to this conceptual tendency or because of the high prevalence of the use of mentoring as inducting beginning teachers, research about the learning of early career teachers has also heavily focused on how mentoring can stimulate teacher growth in the beginning years of teaching (Feiman-Nemser,
Using the theories of adult development as a framework has been useful for understanding the benefits of mentoring because this particular type of induction support for early careers teachers offers a great deal of opportunity for direct conversations and face-to-face discussions about teaching. In these moments of interactions, mentors and teachers have the ability to dialogue, practice, and problem-solve in ways that reflect the kinds of contexts that promote learning.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) outline three different orientations for the relationship between knowledge and practice: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. Knowledge-in-practice “assumes that teachers learn when they have opportunities to prove the knowledge embedded in the work of expert teachers” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250), while knowledge-for-practice “assumes that the knowledge teachers need to teach well is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). Conceptualizing teacher learning through the lens of the latter two, several studies have contributed to the literature about the kind and benefits of mentoring on teacher learning.

Feiman-Nemser (2012) conducted a series of case studies that followed the mentoring practices of several mentor teachers. Through her research and own experiences, Feiman-Nemser argues that what new teachers need is not simply guide but a mentor who sees herself as a teacher of novices (2012). The in depth analyses of the mentors of early career teachers revealed that mentor teachers who perceive themselves as a teacher of teachers adopt a mindset of what Feiman-Nemser has coined “mentored learning to teach” (2012, 237). This mindset and the belief that mentors are capable of being agents of change in their mentee’s lives (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 254):
Rests on an explicit vision of good teaching and an understanding of teacher learning. Mentors who share this orientation attend to beginning teachers’ present concerns, questions, and purposes without losing sight of long-term goals for teacher development. They interact with novices in ways that foster an inquiring stance. They cultivate skills and habits that enable novices to learn in and from their practice. They use their knowledge and expertise to assess the direction novices are heading and to create opportunities and conditions that support meaningful teacher learning.

It appears then that Feiman-Nemser’s work (2012) supports the notion that early career teachers are able to gain from mentors meaningful habits of mind and practice that enable the kind of learning from practice that stimulates growth towards the central tasks of learning to teach.

Wong, Britton, and Ganser (2005) surveyed the induction practices of five countries (Switzerland, Japan, France, New Zealand, and China) as a means to contribute to a broader understanding of the meaning of induction. What the authors found was that these countries “provide well-funded support that reaches all beginning teachers, incorporates multiple sources of assistance, typically lasts as least two years, and goes beyond the imparting of mere survival skill” (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005, p. 379). The authors describe multiple opportunities in each of the five countries that early career teachers are able to take part in as a means to continue to engage their minds in the intellectual work of thinking about teaching such as practice teaching groups, workshops, peer observation, district hotlines for subject specific questions, and office space shared by the entire staff (Wong, Britton, and Ganser, 2005). What distinguishes the countries in the report as believers in the learning needs of beginning teachers is that each actively begin with the mindset that a teacher is a life-long learner, and therefore, the support policies are based on a philosophy that “explicitly rejects a ‘deficit’ model of induction, which assumes that new teachers lack training and competence and thus need mentors” (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005, p. 380). Money, time, and a commitment to the continuing education of
teachers are instrumental in supporting the vision of good induction: “a highly organized and comprehensive form of staff development, involving many people and components, that typically continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher’s career” (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005, p. 379).

Several other studies have pointed out how certain induction practices and support of early career teachers reflect either a misunderstanding of teacher learning or certain mindsets that can negatively influence the growth of beginning teachers. One such study conducted by Kardos and Moore Johnson (2010) found that even though a high number of teachers are assigned mentors, very few teachers are observed by their mentors or spend time in conversations about instructional practices. This finding of how teachers experience mentoring stands in contradiction to Feiman-Nemser’s “mentored learning to teach” model (2012) because there were guidelines and expectations for mentoring behavior and activities that were either not thought out by administration, unclear to mentor teachers, or poorly enacted. Whatever the reason may be, it is clear that “many new teachers are getting virtually nothing from their mentors” (Kardos & Johnson, 2010, p. 36). Likewise this also suggests that new teachers who are merely assigned mentors are not put into contexts that prompts the same kind of learning as teachers who experience educative mentoring, mentoring that is thoughtfully structured to stimulate teacher learning.

The finding from Kardos and Moore Johnson’s (2010) study may be partially explained by a report that found that “teachers who serve as cooperating teachers or mentor teachers… rarely see themselves as school based teacher educators, responsible for helping novices learn to teach” (Feiman-Nemser, 1998, p. 64). What this suggests is that mentor teachers do not always view their responsibility through the lens of teacher learning. A second research team found that
even when principals accepted a role in the learning process of their teachers, they did not always feel prepared to enact that role or understand the learning trajectory of beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). However, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2007) also found that principals who graduated from programs emphasizing the role of school leadership in teacher learning did create school environments of supporting effective teaching.

The findings from the studies reviewed suggest three critical conclusions about the connection between teacher support and learning. First, teaching is a learned practice rather than an instinctual activity (Feiman-Nemser, Parker, & Zeichner, 1992). Second, teachers continue to learn about teaching and learning after graduating from a pre-service program (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Third, the contexts of beginning teacher support matters. In other words, teacher learning will not occur by accident or happenstance but by thoughtful enactment of an induction program. The teacher learning framework outlined by Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) offers a rich means to conceptualize the complex components involved when speaking of early career teacher learning. This framework allows for a flexible implementation to meet the learning needs of novice teachers because it does not prescribe specific tasks, thinking, or timing. Rather the framework can be thought of a guiding strategy for teacher learning that is capable of addressing novice teachers at their individual development level because it is attending to conditions of how teachers learn. Such a framework is compatible with various notions of what teachers need to learn in their beginning years, and because of this, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s framework of teacher learning acts as a complement to Feiman-Nemser’s notion of central tasks of learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). These frameworks also both perceive
teacher learning as a continuum that occurs over time, beyond the borders of traditional teacher preparation programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

**Multiple Stances of Mentoring**

To date, as evidenced by the reviewed literature, much of the empirical research about early career teacher learning has focused on questions involving mentoring. This is likely because mentoring is the most common induction support offered to new teachers (Smith & Ingergoll, 2004), and therefore it is crucial to understand the impact of such a complex and expensive support (Feiman-Nemser, Parker, & Zeichner, 1992). In order to develop an understanding of such a rich and implemented support structure, it is important to explicate the ways in which mentoring has been perceived, conceptualized, and utilized in the literature and how this has impacted practice. Previous literature approaches this in three ways: 1) outlining and categorizing models of mentoring; 2) behaviors of mentors; and 3) tasks of mentoring.

Richter and his colleagues (2013) argue that the most recent literature on mentoring is built from the theories of Cochran-Smith and Paris as well as Feiman-Nemser. Beginning with Cochran-Smith and Paris (1995), these researchers juxtapose two models of mentoring, knowledge transmission or knowledge transformation. As part of mentoring from a knowledge transmission stance, “mentors perceive their role as expert teacher and transmit their knowledge with a hierarchically structured relationship” (Richter, et al., 2013, p. 168). This is contrasted to a knowledge transformation stance where a mentor and beginning teacher are positioned in a more collaborative relationship that is focused on mutual generation of knowledge about teaching and learning. Richter, et al (2013) argue that even though the researchers (Cochran-Smith and Paris, Feiman-Nemser) utilize different language to describe models of mentoring,
there is significant overlap in the models’ theoretical stances to the task of mentoring and the way in which this stance aligns with theories of learning. In particular, there are parallels between Cochrane-Smith and Paris’ (1995) mentoring as knowledge transformation and Feiman-Nemser’s educative mentoring (2012). Likewise, Richter and his colleagues (2013) argue that Cochrane-Smith and Paris’ mentoring as knowledge transmission is similar to that of what Feiman-Nemser calls conventional mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) that is characterized by “situational adjustment to the new school environment, technical advice, and emotional support” (Richter, et al., 2013, p. 168).

While empirical and conceptual literature appear to more frequently use the terminology of mentoring, practitioner literature also introduces the notion of coaching when describing the relationship between a more veteran and beginning teacher whose work is driven by goals of assisting the novice teacher in professional practices. Knight and his colleagues (Knight, 2009) outline what they call instructional coaching, a model that is characterized by a collaborative partnership approach to the work between a coach and teacher that emphasizes the observation and dialogue of a new teacher’s classroom in order to refine practices. The intention of instructional coaching, as Knight and his colleagues describe (2009), is for the meaning making about the classroom to be achieved collaboratively between a coach and teacher. Whereas instructional coaching is focused on observation and reflection of classroom practices in order to drive refinement, cognitive coaching (Ellison & Hayes, 2009) is focused on collaborative thinking and reflection as a means to encourage transformational learning. These two approaches to coaching appear to fit the descriptions that Richter, et al (2013) offer for both knowledge transmission or transformation, suggesting that what is key is the way in which coaching is implemented. In other words, instructional coaching can be implemented in such a
way that it embodies knowledge transformation/educative mentoring stances (or, likewise, knowledge transmission/conventional mentoring stances), and one of the key mechanisms of implementation is the way in which coaches and beginning teachers are positioned to work collaboratively.

Where Richter and his colleagues (2013) provide descriptions for models of mentoring and Knight (2009) describes activities of coaching, other literature has focused on the specific approaches that mentors take and the categories of support. For example, Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, and Niles (1992) found from a survey of 150 mentor teachers that they believed their work with beginning teachers fell into one of three categories: direct professional assistance, direct personal/professional assistance, and indirect personal/professional assistance. What was novel about these findings was the distinction between direct and indirect types of assistance where direct forms of support may include feedback to the new teacher, and indirect forms of support may be such ideas as a mentor setting up opportunities like observations or participation in professional development (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). Findings from Wilder’s (1992) report corroborate the activities of mentoring from previous literature as well as extend the literature by offering categories of support provided by mentors. In particular, Wilder (1992) concluded that mentors provide support across three categories: professional, technical, and personal. Although the report is now over 20 years old, these categories of potential support offered by mentors or coaches are still recognized as being important components of the veteran–novice relationship (e.g. Moir, 2003; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Hudson, 2012).
Summary

The intention of this dissertation study is to investigate and argue for a rich understanding of all the components that are important to supporting teacher learning in one’s first years, including that of mentoring. This study utilized three theories associated with adult development and learning: Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s (1998) framework of adult learning; Feiman-Nemser’s theory of the central tasks of learning to teach in order to investigate and understand what early career teachers learn and under what conditions early career teachers learn; and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) definitions of teacher learning. The analysis and interpretation of findings will be guided by these three theories. The specific research and practical aims that preface Chapter 3 reflect my primary focus on “the relative contributions of formal and informal influences on the teacher’s capacity for continued learning” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 29).
CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Chapters 1 and 2 focused on developing a narrative that outlines the need for and importance of investigation into early career teacher learning. Given this focus, I conducted a study with the following research aims:

- Explore what early career teachers perceive as support for their learning and development;
- Investigate why teachers perceive certain induction supports as contributing more to their learning than others;
- Examine what and how teachers perceive they learn from induction supports.

The study also addressed the following practical aims:

- Provide a rationale for expanding the current, most common understanding of teacher induction support as mentoring towards a more comprehensive perspective with multiple supports;
- Offer guidance to school and district administrators around what kind of support structures promote teacher learning across the first three years of teaching;
- Suggest new structures or sets of practice that will promote early career teacher learning.
Research Questions

From the outlined research and practical aims, the following research questions oriented this study:

1) What do beginning teachers value in an induction program as it contributes to their learning?

2) How do beginning teachers perceive certain induction components as helpful to their learning?

In this chapter, I will outline and justify the qualitative research design utilized in this study. A qualitative case study approach allowed for the incorporation of multiple perspectives to be included as well multiple data sources in order to develop an understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Stake, 2006; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). Participant interviews and observations promoted indepth questioning, probing around particular topics, and direct insight into interactions among participants. This not only provided opportunities to examine individual experiences with constructs but also to understand the multiple layers of the environment and culture that influence individuals. In this way, the data collected from this study addressed both what is valued to contribute to teacher learning and in what ways do supports contribute to teacher learning.

The theoretical framework for my methodological approach adheres to a social constructivist foundation described by Creswell to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation” (2013, pp. 24-25). To address the primary question and better understand the connections between teacher support and teacher learning, this study situates itself in two particular social contexts. First, it is believed that the words and lived experiences of the
beginning teachers as members of the studied induction programs will provide a critical understanding of the perceptions of support and learning. The second social context in which this study is situated is within the larger structure of schools and districts, and this necessitates the need to pay attention to the dynamics of the social context within which early career teachers are embedded.

The research design of this study utilized a phenomenological approach, relying heavily upon interviews with participants (Seidman, 2006). The primary phenomenon under investigation is that of ‘teacher learning.’ This approach was chosen because it allows for investigation of “several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell J. W., 2013, p. 76). This approach also allows for investigation of “what they experienced and how they experienced it” (Creswell J. W., 2013, p. 76). Using a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of teachers’ learning relies on the philosophical foundation that meaning is made through one’s experience with a phenomenon, and therefore this approach appropriately addressed and embraced the research questions in this study which sought to understand teachers’ perceptions of induction supports and the learning that is promoted through such structures.

The cases for this qualitative case study approach are bounded by individual school districts. Although the actual sample for this study will be discussed next, by using a school district as a boundary for a case, it can be generally assumed that all beginning teachers within that school take part in a similar beginning teacher induction program, exist under and within common programmatic guidelines, and that there are similar enough experiences across participants to examine what is the heart of the issue of the case. This assumption aligns with Ragin’s (1997) description of case-oriented research where “studies start with the seemingly
simple idea that social phenomena in like settings… may parallel each other sufficiently to permit comparing and contrasting” (28). This is not to be confused, however, with assuming that teachers’ experiences with the induction program are similar but rather that the school’s implementation of the program is applied rather uniformly to its employees. Ragin (1997) continues by arguing that the burden on the researcher, then, is to provide enough evidence of what constitutes a case and that cases are relevant enough to one another.

**Setting**

The schools for this study are situated within the state of New Hampshire for two primary reasons. First, as of February 2012, the state of New Hampshire does not require that districts or schools provide any form of induction support for its teachers (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013; Goldrick, Osta, Barlin, & Burn, 2012). This meant that there were opportunities to study the variation in the implementation of beginning teacher induction programs across multiple cases. For the current study, it was decided to only use schools that share similar state policies with respect to certification, population of students, similar state universities, similar tenure practices, and similar labor laws. In this way, some of the practices of the schools in the study may be consistent, but it may also be the case that individual schools that offer induction supports do not identify them using certain language or that there is common language of induction supports across the cases. What this could mean is that this study captured an accurate representation of what teachers experience and perceive as induction support without the constraints of common language.

A second reason that this study will situate itself within New Hampshire schools is that there is currently an initiative driven by the New Hampshire Institutions of Higher Education
Network (IHE Network), a nonprofit consortium of all public and private educator preparation programs from colleges and universities in New Hampshire, to develop a system of regional support for graduates from the state’s higher education system. This means that any teacher who graduates from a college in the state of New Hampshire and is hired to teach at a district within the state will have access to induction support from the university designated to be that region’s institution for new teacher support. The findings from this study of New Hampshire schools and districts could be used to inform the implementation of the IHE Network’s initiative to support beginning teachers.

Recruitment and Description of Participants

As a means to begin to understand the landscape of teacher induction support in New Hampshire, I met with an individual from the New Hampshire affiliate of the National Education Association. This meeting provided a historical context of initiatives, monies, and other individuals who had been involved with teacher support. This meeting led to a connection with an individual who, until recently, facilitated the New Hampshire Mentors’ Network in February 2015. Before attending a meeting of the New Hampshire Mentors’ Network, an application to the University of New Hampshire’s Institutional Review Board was submitted in January 2015 and, after minor re-writes, was approved March 2015.

I first attended a meeting of the New Hampshire Mentors’ Network where I met a group of mentors from several school districts across the state. The New Hampshire Mentors’ Network has been meeting for over 10 years, and attendance in open to anyone with an interest in teacher induction, mentoring, and support. This included mentors, superintendents, program coordinators, and human resources personnel. From this, I contacted five school districts to
inquire about their interest in participating in the study. Four school districts responded to my e-mails, and a total of three districts decided to participate in the study. Permission was secured to study the mentoring programs of the three districts (Bakerston, Clarkeville, and Garfield School Districts) from program administrators, including program coordinators, principals, and assistant superintendents.

There were a total of 14 participants, outlined in Table 1, who agreed to be interviewed for this study. Of these, there were 5 teachers, 5 mentors, 1 principal, and 3 state level personnel. Teachers in the study had a range of years of experience in the classroom, where one teacher was in his first year of teaching and another teacher was in her sixth year of teaching (and in the mentoring program in her district because this was the first year in this district). Mentors in the study also had a range of years of experience in their role as a mentor, with one mentor in her second year and another mentor in her eleventh year of mentoring, and mentors in the study had an average of 5 years of experience.

All teachers and mentors were contacted via e-mail about participation in the study, and upon agreement, interviews were arranged. Most interviews occurred in person, although two interviews were conducted via phone based on the availability of the participant. Although the initial interview was the first time that I met most participants, I had some context about the mentoring program of the school district, a critical components of qualitative research (Seidman, 2006), because I had first interviewed mentor leaders from each district as well as attended a meeting. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to nearly 2 hours. I then e-mailed several participants follow up questions for clarification and further inquiry around support structures. If participants agreed, interviews were audio recorded. All but three interviews were audio recorded.
Table 1: Description of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years Experience (teaching/mentoring)</th>
<th>Grade Level and Content Taught</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claire #</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle School, Physical Education</td>
<td>Bakerston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan #</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bakerston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Bakerston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High School, Science</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High School, Science</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilly †</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle School, ELA</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High School, Math</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy †</td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elementary, Special Education</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>State Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia*</td>
<td>State Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>State Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Garfield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# represents a mentor-mentee pair
† represents a mentor-mentee pair
* data from participant not part of final analysis

The following sections provide a more detailed description of each of the participating cases of this study.

Bakerston School District

The mentoring program in Bakerston School District is the longest running of three that are part of my study. The mentoring program serves 11 schools across 9 towns. Bakerston has
had a mentoring program for the last 11 years, but the program was not renewed beyond the 2014-2015 school year. Bakerston, which utilized a full time district mentor, has one mentor as part of its mentoring program. Claire has been the district mentor since the beginning of the program. The program was designed to support teachers new to the profession as well as teachers new to the district. Although there was not a specified mission or vision statement, according to the Bakerston’s School District Mentor Program website, the goal of the program is “designed to support all of our new teachers hired with or without experience through a differentiated approach.” (Name of website omitted to preserve anonymity of the school district.)

Generally, teachers new to the profession work with Claire as their mentor for 2 years, and teachers new to the district participate in the program for 1 year. This year, the program had 22 mentees. In conjunction with Claire as their mentor, mentees are also assigned peer partners. These are colleagues who are, in general, in the same building as the new teacher, often teach the same subject, and often teach a similar grade level. Claire created a binder for peer partners to outline their role in helping the new teacher as well as provide resources. Peer partners often took on the role of a local guide, helping new teachers with such new tasks as how to use the copy machine, where to find curriculum items such as textbooks or computer files of curriculum from previous years, and navigating the school grading system. However, peer partners were not responsible for observing or conducting formal learning and reflective coaching conversations.

The program at Bakerston was designed for teachers to receive multiple supports, although nearly all of these were provided by Claire, the district mentor. These supports are: 1) a multi-day new teacher orientation prior to the start of the school year where new teachers tour the school district (to see schools other than their own) as well as meet the principals and district leadership (Claire invited the principals and superintendent each year to a luncheon with new
teachers, although they were not required to attend and there were various levels of participation); 2) cycles of coaching. Claire differentiates the mentoring that teachers receive between their first and second years in the program. Claire also differentiated the kind of mentoring that teachers received based on the needs of the individual teachers. For example, Claire described working with a teacher every week to help with their weekly schedule/plan; 3) after school professional development workshops designed and facilitated by Claire around topics relevant to beginning teachers.

Claire spoke about the ways in which the current (2014-2015) program looks different than the first year of the program. Over the years, Claire worked to build the mentoring program by increasing the number of supports offered to new teachers or changing already existing supports based on feedback or needs of the district. During the first year, Claire’s goal was to “get into classrooms”, and she developed a feedback slip that she was provide to teachers immediately at the end of the observation. The observation form included three components: Notes, Suggestions, and Questions for the teacher. Over the next couple of years, she added components such as after school workshops and peer partners. Claire kept a record of the component that she added each year as a way to document how the program has grown and changed, creating notebooks of the mentoring programs for each year of its existence.

Over the years, the program in Bakerston has evolved in how mentoring and Claire’s work with new teachers is implemented. Claire spoke about how she would “go into classes and often takes hand written notes” and would “then write my observations into an electronic version of Danielson’s rubric so that I and my mentee know what area or category I is making observations on” (Claire). She noticed that “I was giving them [the mentee] this data [from an observation] but I realized that sometimes they don’t know what they don’t know. So I started
giving them guided questions [when reading through data]” (Claire). Another change that Claire implemented over the course of her years leading the mentoring program was that she “made it a requirement that two conversations each year be learning focused and that one of those must be videotaped.” She found that teachers were nervous about being videotaped, and if she gave teachers the choice when to video, it helped with buy-in. Claire described the process for videotaping:

After the classes that I videoed, I would give teachers the flipcam so that could watch the class on their own. I also gave teachers an analysis sheet for them to fill out while watching the video, but I generally did not watch the video with the teacher.

One component of the program that Claire talked about being particularly proud of as part of her program was beginning a student panel to assist in new teacher development. The panel of students would attend the new teacher orientation as well as meet with Claire during the course of the school year. Students acted as an advisory board and would speak at the new teacher orientation about topics such as things that teachers have done they see as effective, things that teachers have done that have not been effective, what are things that teachers have done that have helped the students, and what are things that are most important to the students. Claire and the student panel presented their work about using a student advisory system to assist with beginning teacher learning at the New Teacher Center conference one year.

The mentoring program at Bakerston was embedded in multiple ways in the district, one of which was the leadership (school and district) involvement and support. Prior to beginning the mentoring program in Bakerston, Claire was a former school teacher and then a school principal. She transitioned into her role as the district mentor from being a “teaching principal.” Claire described how important it was to her that she did not take an evaluative role as a mentor
with her teachers. As a former principal, Claire had known and worked with other principals in the school district for many years. She spoke about how this put her in the position of being able to work with principals to better help beginning teachers. The conversations between Claire and principals as well as between Claire and her mentees were all kept confidential, but principals would sometimes make suggestions to Claire about certain areas for she and the new teacher to work on.

The beginning of the mentoring program in Bakerston started under the leadership of a superintendent who was incredibly supportive of the initiative. Prior to assuming the role of the district mentor, Claire worked to revise the district’s teacher evaluation system, and from this, she was asked about an interest in beginning a beginning teacher mentoring program. The superintendent at the time of the program’s onset would require teachers in the program who needed to be absent from an after school workshop with Claire to write to him in advance. At the start of each year, Claire was invited to present about her program to the district’s school board, and during these presentations, she paid particular attention to speaking about what had been effective the previous year and what was changing for the upcoming year. Claire describes her interaction with the board when she said, “every year I was doing presentations to the board and I kept a spreadsheet of how I improve the program every year, as I would implement new pieces” (Claire). At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, the last year of Bakerston current iteration of its mentoring program, Claire was away during that particular school board meeting and the assistant superintendent presented about the district’s mentoring program to the school board. Claire was also asked to keep a low profile, but it was unclear to her why this was being asked of her or her program.
The Clarkeville School District had the smallest and youngest mentoring program of the three districts in this study. During the time of data collection (the 2014-2015 school year), there were a total of 9 mentees guided by 6 mentors who also had full time teaching responsibilities in the district. The program was guided by the philosophy embodied in the mission statement outlined in the Mentor Handbook “The mentoring program is available to all new employees in [Clarkeville] to support growth and development of individual skills as they relate to our learning community” (Clarkeville School District Mentor Handbook, pg. 4). All teachers new to the profession, new to the district, and new to their teaching position were assigned a mentor. This meant that even a person who had been teaching for a number of years within Clarkeville and change grade levels would be assigned a mentor for at least one year. In general, teachers who were new to the profession were assigned a mentor for their first 2 years, and the intention was that the mentor would remain the same across the two years. This, however, was dependent upon the availability of mentors as well as the compatibility of mentor and mentee. Teachers who were new to the district but not to the profession were generally assigned a mentor for 1 year, but continued participation in the program was based on the recommendation of the school principal as well as the mentor of the teacher. Most of the 9 teachers who were mentees were new to the district but not to teaching.

To become a mentor in Clarkeville, an experienced teacher would either be asked by a current mentor, asked by their principal, or could experience personal interest in becoming a mentor. Mentors were required to have three years of experience teaching in Clarkeville School District as well (Mentor Handbook). New mentors attend a mentor training offered during the summer, offered through one of the state’s regional professional centers. This has been
contracted for years to the Mentor Program Coordinator of Garfield School District (a pseudonym because Garfield School District is also a participant of this study). Mentors were given a small yearly stipend for their work. The mentor stipends were begun by an assistant superintendent who used to be in the district, but at the time of this study was no longer there. Mentors meet with one another on a monthly basis to discuss their assistance of their mentees as well as planning the workshops. Beyond the initial mentor training, there is no ongoing professional development for mentors.

Mentors make every effort to observe their mentee’s classroom once or twice a year. According to the end of year survey, two mentees responded that their mentor was able to see them teach. There was not money for release time or hiring substitutes for mentors to observe their mentees. One mentor mentioned that teachers in the district had a certain number of professional development days where she could ask for a substitute teacher to attend a meeting or conference, and she did have the option of using one of her professional development days to observe her mentee. One mentor, Karen, described the resources as saying that there are “some mentor stipends and then I think we have $100 for training. And for training are teachers [teachers who are mentors] need to use their PD [professional development] funds for that” (Karen). Mentees also the option of using their professional development days to observe their mentor or other teachers.

There were two primary supports offered to new teachers in the Clarkeville School District. First, new teachers to the profession, district, or grade level are assigned a mentor. Mentors and mentees typically meet on a weekly basis, and they engage in reflective mentoring conversations. The mentors and mentees usually met during their lunchtime or after school. Most mentors reported being able to meet with their mentees on a weekly basis. During the
mentor meeting, some mentors talked about how this caused extra stress on their schedules (and days) because being a mentor often meant longer days in order to accomplish all their tasks done. The second primary support offered to new teachers is a monthly after school professional development workshop where topics were focused a range of topics from curriculum and instructional practices, cultural conversations about students and families, and practical tools (e.g. using the online gradebook platform). All mentors and mentees were present at the after school workshop times. Likely after school mentee meetings will become quarterly rather than monthly in subsequent years. In past years, a new teacher orientation prior to the start of the school year was offered to new employees, but this had not been the case in past few years.

In Clarkeville, the teacher mentoring program is lead nearly completely by the mentors themselves. Although the program was begun under the leadership of an assistant superintendent over 6 years ago, the current vision and implementation of the program is now done by the mentors. They hold themselves accountable for mentoring as well as planning and facilitating activities like new teacher orientation and monthly meetings, and this is often accomplished by different mentors taking primary responsibility for different workshops. The mentors share leadership and decision making about the mentoring program among themselves, including decisions about pairing mentors and mentees, workshops to offer, and recommendations about teachers who may benefit from continuing in the program (beyond the normal required participation). The mentors also planned meeting times and agendas for the mentor task force (what the mentors called their mentors’ group). Mentors have a great deal of pride in their responsibility of being a mentor and see their mentoring program as a grass roots movement.

The participants from Clarkeville School District in this study are from the district’s two elementary schools. The mentors from the elementary school do not meet and are not connected
with the middle and high school. There have been attempts to connect mentors from the elementary schools and the middle and high schools, but at the time of data collection, that had not yet occurred. The mentors also reported not having a great deal of interaction with administration around their work. The mentors group asked to present their work to the district’s school board, and, after being postponed several times, the group was able to present at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. since the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. The mentors reported that there was not regular communication with the two building principals about the program or its mentees. Most of the meetings in which I was a participant came at the end of the year, so the majority of the conversations between mentors and principals was around who currently was part of the mentoring program that should continue and who were new hires that needed to be assigned a mentor.

Garfield School District

Garfield is a three town school district, and data collection for this study occurred in two of the three towns. The mentoring program in Garfield was begun about 9 years ago by an individual who has since moved on from the position but still works in the school district. The program serves all three towns in the school district, and it is overseen by the District Program Coordinator. There have been a total of 4 district coordinators since the beginning of the program. The coordinator of the mentoring program has several job responsibilities: serves as a mentor to new teachers; serves as a mentor to the other district mentors; creates all the professional development workshops for the new teachers and the mentors; works with the assistant superintendent to oversee the mentoring program and develop the budget for the program; and serves on the district’s administrative team. The current coordinator of the
program, Hannah, also meets monthly with the schools’ principals to discuss the implementation of the program in the school, what the needs of the principal are for the future years, and any concerns about the program.

According to many of the participants, the district has a fairly low average income and a fairly high crime rate as compared to neighboring towns. The SES and poverty of the district was an important point because nearly all of the participants I spoke to talked about the difference in salary that teachers are paid for working in Garfield rather than another nearby district. This was a point of tension as some teachers were thinking about leaving the district because of the difference in pay while other participants talked about all the other perks that teachers in Garfield received that made the salary equal out to a lower salary (e.g., the mentoring program, good insurance). One of the major concerns of the Garfield School District was the retention of teachers in the school district. In the 2015-2016 school year (the year after data collection), there are an anticipated 52 new staff members who will be part of the mentoring program. This is significant because 1) it’s likely the largest number in the mentoring program since it began; and 2) this represents a large chunk of the instructional staff (164 teachers, 140 instructional staff). The program coordinator was unsure if she was going to have enough mentors to support the members the program in the upcoming year.

The mentoring program in Garfield serves two different categories of teachers: teachers new to the district as well as teachers new to the profession. Teachers who are new to the profession are served by mentors for 2 years, and teachers who are new to the district are generally served for 1 year. However, the decision to serve any teacher longer is discussed between the coordinator and the principal. The program is driven by the Mission Statement written in the Induction with Mentoring Handbook: “The Garfield School District’s Induction
with Mentoring Program is committed to supporting the growth and development of teachers new to our districts” (Garfield School District Induction with Mentoring 2014-2015 Handbook, pg. 5). The program is organized so that there is a curriculum for first year teachers and a separate curriculum for second year, more experienced teachers. While the program coordinator serves as a mentor, most of the teachers are assigned mentors who are still full time teaching staff. The mentor coordinator and the principal are the ones who assign the mentor-mentee pairs, and there is a strong emphasis on trying to assign a mentee with a mentor in the same building. Some principals wanted the mentor and mentee pair not to teach the same grade level because there is generally time built throughout the school week for teachers of grade levels to collaborate. This was mostly at the elementary level. Some mentors were assigned 2 mentees although most had 1 mentee. If the match between the pair is good, mentors generally stay with the same beginning teacher for the 2 years that they are in the program.

New mentors participate in a week long training prior to the start of the school that covers such topics as how to have learning conversations, what are the elements of reflective coaching, what are the norms of collaboration, and how to conduct data gathering during an observation. During the course of the school year, mentors also meet together as a large group, led by Hannah. Such topics covered during these meetings are how mentoring has been going, what are some challenges of mentoring, and what are some things that the mentors have seen the new teachers grow. The focus of these meetings was also on the ongoing professional development of mentors. Mentees also go through a new teacher orientation to the school district prior to the start of the school year. During the course of the year, teachers generally meet together in a large group based on the year (1st year or 2nd year) that they are, and all new teachers meet altogether occasionally once or twice a year. Hannah has intentionally made the focus of these workshops
about collaboration among the teachers rather than having a singular, content driven workshop ‘taught’ by the coordinator. For some of these workshops, teachers are given release time from their classrooms for the day.

During the course of the school year, mentors and mentees meet together once every week for about 1 hour. Mentors are required to record the topic of the conversation into the district’s professional development database. This is because participation in the mentor program is required in order to receive professional development points. Mentors also do a series of coaching cycles throughout the course of the year. Coaching cycles include a pre-conference with their mentee, an observation, followed by a specific reflective mentoring conversation to address the observation focus. The number is based on the experience level of the teacher. Principals are also expected to also do a series of observation and feedback cycles in preparation for the yearly evaluation.

The mentoring program in Garfield hired a separate mentor to work with beginning special educators. The special education mentor had been a special education teacher in the district for the past 30 years, and she is now retired. She worked with both the new special educators as well as teachers who are going through the alternative certification process. The district decided to offer special education teachers a specialized mentor because they believed that learning the policies and procedures of special education requires extra time to master and also requires a person who is familiar with the knowledge of special education law.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began in March 2015. I had met mentors from each of the three districts at the NH Mentors’ Network meeting and had basic information about each of the respective
programs before visiting each district. Before interviews in two of the districts, I attended after school meetings between mentors and mentees (in one district) and among mentors in a second district. After this, I asked for and conducted interviews with the lead mentor from each district. This initial interview with a district mentor lead to them connecting me with other mentors as well as teachers who currently or had recently participated in the mentoring program.

There were several sources of data collected. First, interviews represented the foundation and bulk of data for this study. As mentioned before, interviews were audio recorded. Second, field notes were taken during all interviews. Field notes paid particularly attention to follow up questions, probing questions, key quotations, emotional responses that may have been difficult to hear on the recording, and basic facts about the individual or program. Third, districts shared with me various documents from their mentoring program. These included handbooks of the programs, vision statements, teacher observation feedback forms, mentor training materials, and surveys from their respective mentoring programs’ participants. It is important to note that the surveys shared with me were conducted by the lead mentor or mentoring team, usually from the previous year from this study’s data collection. Two districts utilized web-based survey programs, and this meant that the responses were completely anonymous not only to me, but the mentors as well. Surveys conducted by the mentors generally collected end-of-year information about the program: what did teachers like, what did they find helpful, what did they find difficult, what recommendations would they make.

All documents were saved to my personal, password-protected computer. These included transcriptions, write-ups of field notes, uploaded interviews (when possible), scanned copies of signed consent forms, and electronic documents shared with me by districts. The folder was organized generally by participating district for clarity of access for later referral.
Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in multiple stages and involved an iterative process (Baxter & Jack, 2008) between transcribing fieldwork and memoing as outlined in Schram (2006). Although the content of the memos was varied, memos generally involved outlining key ideas represented in the current interview or meeting, themes that may be emerging about teacher support, and lingering questions for participants as well as myself. Almost immediately after interviewing a participant or attending a meeting, field notes were transcribed and a memo was written. This process continued to inform subsequent interviews by influencing questions asked during the semi-structured protocol. In June and July 2015, the audio files of interviews were transcribed. I transcribed all interviews personally and transcriptions were completed using Dragon Text Speech, and after the initial writing, the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy. After each interview was transcribed, another memo was written following similar purposes as those after field notes. This process allowed for more directed interviews around the notion of beginning teacher support and learning, and this iterative data analysis technique was helpful in identifying emergent themes throughout the course of the study.

As a first step to analyzing the data, I reviewed all pieces of data collected to develop an understanding of this as a case study. While I initially believed that this was a case study of induction, my data lead me to understand this more precisely as a case study of mentoring, in part because of the way in which I approached the analysis of my data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The development of this dissertation into a case study of mentoring programs was influenced by the manner of individual participant recruitment as well as the districts who ultimately represent the cases, an issue discussed by Gobo (2004). The initial introduction to individuals who would eventually become participants in the study was through a network of New Hampshire mentors,
and each of their respective districts had mentoring programs in place. Members of all participating districts specifically identified their programs as mentoring programs; they identified themselves as mentors; and there was a common notion that mentoring programs and induction programs are not synonymous terms. The permeating belief held by leaders of the three district programs was that induction is necessary but not sufficient for the development of new teachers, and that mentoring was a key component of induction. What this lead me to conclude is that this case study was focused on programs that offered mentoring programs as part of an induction initiative for new teachers.

Each of the three districts in the study represented a single case for analysis. This followed from the fact that data collection occurred in three school districts’ mentoring programs; participants in the study shared the common experience of involvement in a mentoring program; and participants all had a conceptualization and developed an understanding of the idea of mentoring. The districts themselves had multiple schools in their respective mentoring programs, but the mentoring programs were considered a district program. This is evidenced by the fact that in two out of three of the districts (who had full time mentor positions), there were individuals who held titles of district mentors, and they had responsibilities for mentoring teachers across multiple schools in their respective district. In all three of the participating districts, the guidelines and goals of the mentoring program were the same across all schools and participants, and there was either a mentoring program handbook that outlined these guidelines or a website with a vision statement.

As it was the intention of each mentoring program to have consistent guidelines for the implementation and execution of its program, this suggests that differences in reported perceptions or experiences on the part of participants likely indicated substantive findings about
the ways in which different individuals experience and various ways they value the construct of mentoring. An understanding of cases bounded by districts also provided the opportunity for two different levels of analysis: one at the case level and one across the cases. While there were commonalities across the three programs, each district was distinct in terms of size, geographical location, average socioeconomic status of its student population, and age of mentoring program. Understanding a case bounded by a district allowed for analysis to take into account how the broader context of that education environment and community influenced and interacted with the implementation of the mentoring program and the beliefs about new teachers. The three districts were related as cases in the case study, in particular, because of their mentoring programs.

The next step in analyzing data was to identify a unit of analysis and possible issues at play first within and then across the districts. This involved a process of reflecting and memoing about the data within each district around such questions as ‘what is at issue’, ‘what is this a case of’, and finishing the statement ‘this is a case of…’ (e.g. Baxter & Jack, 2008; VanWynsberghe, 2007. Reflecting and writing around these three prompts, allowed for close attention to be paid to what was most important for explaining what was happening in each district. It was then necessary to look across the three cases to consider possible similar explanations for participant experiences, program implementation, and context of the school district as a means to put forth a unit of analysis. This within-case and across-case analysis approach followed the work of Ayres, Kavanaugh, and Knafl (2003) when they argue that “the qualitative researcher must develop an interpretation of these data that reflects each individual’s experience and applies equally well across all of the accounts that constitute the data set” (871). The determination of a unit of analysis was key because it offered a fundamental thread or binding agent by which I was
able to argue that the cases are similar and relevant enough in order to be compared and contrasted.

At the onset of data analysis, I posited that this case study had a unit of analysis of ‘teacher mentoring.’ However, this did not encapsulate what VanWynsberghe and Kahn argue when they write that “case study is, in part, a response to ongoing discussions about the relationship between the unit of analysis and the case itself” (2007, p. 6). This is problematic for a couple of reasons, one being that if ‘teacher mentoring’ were to be the unit of analysis, what would be the broader phenomenon under investigation? Instead, I propose that the broader phenomenon is ‘teacher mentoring’ and therefore, this study was a case study of ‘teacher mentoring’. VanWynsberghe and Kahn also suggest that the unit of analysis is meant to be “directed by the evidence to analyze” (2007, p. 7) a certain social action or movement or phenomenon. Therefore, in this study I argue that this is a case study of teacher mentoring and that the unit of analysis is locus of accountability. I argue this because the evidence that I collected from the three cases of teacher mentoring directed me to analyze the notion of accountability, particularly of school and district leaderships toward teacher assistance. I believe this notion of accountability is a salient issue that informs my understanding of the social context in which each of these programs is implemented.

In the development of the unit of analysis, I drew conceptually upon VanWynsberghe and Kahn (2007), and then I turned to Agar’s (2008) iterative ethnographic approach to data analysis for logical and procedural guidance about the development and testing of the working hypothesis. The unit of analysis functioned as the starting place for positing working hypotheses about the cases, and this cross case analysis lead to a series of working hypotheses (or what Agar calls frames) that are meant to offer a beginning explanation for what critical issues were at play.
Working hypotheses were tested within each case through a focused memo to determine the ability of the hypothesis to offer an explanation of issues within that district. Agar (2008) calls this process one of validation and modification that is intended to lead to multiple rewrites and rewordings of hypotheses so that a single working hypothesis could serve to bind the three cases. A necessary component of developing a working hypothesis was to identify key issues that are at play in the explanation of the mentoring programs of the cases.

Initial coding of data began, first within cases and then across cases, and I established an acceptable working hypothesis. Before any coding took place, all field notes and the transcripts of the audiotapes were re-reviewed at least once with the intention of beginning to sketch ideas of what is happening with the phenomenon. After this initial review of field notes and transcripts an initial memo was written, organizing thoughts around themes that have emerged about the idea of mentoring. Before identifying codes within the data, about 5 possible themes about what constitutes good, high quality mentoring were identified. These 5 themes were given color codes, and a second review of field notes, interview transcriptions, and survey results were then color coded when specific instances of the theme was present. After an initial round of coding, emergent themes were reviewed, and this resulted in some themes being reworded for more accurate representation of the participants; some themes’ ideas were collapsed with others; and some new themes were added. Data was then reviewed and (color) coded again under these revised themes. Considerable attention was paid to balance the development of themes while also keeping a focus on the meanings that individuals were recounting about their experiences (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003).

This iteration among memoing about working hypotheses, reviewing data, and revising themes was done to increase the likelihood of accurately identifying the most salient and
commonly referred to ideas from the participants. This also was done to help decrease the bias of the researcher about the phenomenon of induction support and teacher learning because of increased familiarity with and continued reflection about the data. The overall goal throughout this process was to “winnow the data, reducing them to a small, manageable set of themes to write into the final narrative” (Creswell J. W., 2013, p. 186). Before the final write-up of the findings and interpretation of the findings, an Excel document was created in which all participants, schools, and districts were assigned pseudonyms such that no participants where able to be identified.

Coding was generally organized so that data from the same district was reviewed at the same time. This aided with the identifying themes that early career teachers value for their learning within cases and across cases. Data was then interpreted and presented in two sets of findings: findings by case and findings across cases. Findings across cases were informed by the findings within cases around the themes of teacher support as well as using the multiple memos written throughout the thematic identification process. What this accomplished was the ability to identify larger, more abstract units of understanding as a means to understand the phenomenon of teacher learning through the words of the participants mixed with the interpretations of the researcher (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003).

**Subjectivity**

The primary source of subjectivity and research bias was likely due to the fact that I have been a teacher, mentor, or school leader for the past 11 years. I have been both in the role of receiving and providing support for teaching and learning. This means that I come to my work as a researcher about teacher support and learning with a body of beliefs based on personal
experience. This could potentially impact my research, particularly during the study’s interviews and data analysis. During the interviews, I tried to remain as objective as possible when asking follow-up questions that deviate from the semi-structured interview protocol. This meant that I used my field notes based on the conversation with the participant to use their words and ideas as much as possible. My research could also be vulnerable during the data analysis phase because I may “see” in my data trends that align with my beliefs about teacher learning. This was addressed as much as possible through multiple rounds of data review and constant memoing about my processes and reflections.

Lastly, I believe teaching to be deeply emotional work that lies at the heart of the identity of the individual. I have the deepest respect for teachers and the work that they do. In my research, I was asking individuals to share stories, reflections, and beliefs that they likely found very personal and, perhaps at times, emotional. My difficulty was to remember that I am not their mentor and that the purpose of the interviews was to provide a time and a space to hear the participant’s perspective. I needed to find the balance between caring person and caring researcher in order to collect the data for my work. While finding that balance, I also needed to remember even though I am speaking to individuals because they have something to contribute to my research, they are not simply data points. They are people doing some of the most important work on earth.
Findings are presented in two sections. The first section intends to present the history of mentoring in the state of New Hampshire as a means to contextualize the programs in this study. This section also will describe the three districts and present the development of the case study, the unit of analysis, and variables that have surfaced as being key to understanding the mentoring programs and novice teacher learning. In the second section, findings around the research questions will be presented by first looking within each case and then across the three cases. The names of all participants have been changed, and identification of individuals in this study reflect pseudonyms.

**Situating Mentoring within New Hampshire**

Two participants interviewed for this study have been part of educational initiatives, policies, and professional development at the state level for more than fifteen years. Their perspectives were key because they provided a historical lens for which to understand the development of mentoring programs in the three cases. In both accounts, participants traced the current trends of mentoring in New Hampshire back to an educational symposium that was called together in 2000 by Governor Jeanne Shaheen. The focus of the symposium grew from the “governor’s concern with attracting and retaining quality teachers, we were seeing the aging of the teaching force. We were thinking what could the Department of Education do in this process” (Alice). Individuals with interests in public education were invited to the symposium
including teachers, administrators, individuals from non-profits, individuals from state agencies, professors from institutes of higher education, and legislators.

The talks at the symposium resulted in the group putting forth six initiatives. Two of these recommendations focused on the professional learning of teachers: one was to create regional professional development centers, and a second suggestion was to create a system for induction and mentoring support for beginning teachers. Alice describes how the discussions from the symposium were used to inform next steps:

The department took the data and they came up with six categories to investigate more deeply. And to make recommendations. And one of those categories was for school districts to start induction with mentoring programs. And they were quite specific about, the people in the group were quite specific about saying we need induction and mentoring because we see these as two different things. Induction is sort of the buddy program idea. Necessary but not sufficient. Anyway, so we it called induction with mentoring.

As a facilitator of a small group at the symposium, Alice was asked to lead the task force on the induction of new teachers and was charged with the responsibility of “coming up with recommendations for the legislator and creating a toolkit for districts” (Alice). The task force began by conducting a state-wide survey of induction and mentoring practices and conceptions, and the team found that, despite great attention paid to wording and phrasing of the survey, the results were difficult to interpret because there was no consistent definition or implementation of teacher support across the districts in the state.

The task force, consisting of members from school districts, the state Department of Education, universities, and education companies moved forward with the creation of the Induction with Mentoring (IWM) Toolkit which was intended to serve as a resource for districts with the following specific goals (Figure 3):
Figure 3: Induction with Mentoring Toolkit Goals

- Assess your current program or services.
- Determine collectively where your program is strong and weak, and the subsequent, strategic steps to be taken to develop your program.
- To provide resources that will help in the areas where development is needed.
- To develop a short and long term plan for program development.
- Identify who will be responsible for implementing and maintaining the program.
- Collect and analyze data.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for evaluation.

Source: Induction with Mentoring Toolkit, 2005 (unpublished)

The creation of IWM Toolkit was heavily influenced by Alice’s previous work at Learning Innovations (formerly an organization called The Network) where she was the head of Staff Development. The Network and Learning Innovations were non-profit organizations where Alice’s work focused primarily on school improvement and how schools take up new innovations. In their work with schools and districts, Learning Innovations utilized the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) described by Alice:

It has three component parts. One, is a scale that describes how people feel as they go through the change process. And how they feel gets expressed in concerns… A second component part is another scale that looks at what people are doing in relation to the new thing. And this is reflected in the process of how a school adopts an innovation: it brings in the trainers, it buys the materials, it gets the books, it creates some study groups… The first scale is called stages of concern. That’s the scale for how people feel. The second one is called obviously enough, levels of use. And so if you walk into a school and you watch how people are using an innovation, you can have a pretty good sense of where they are and what they are going to need to move them to the next level. And that’s powerful. If you know where people are in terms of their stage of concern and where they are in their levels of use, now you’re spending your money really efficiently
because you’re doing the things that are going to help people where they are. The third component part of the CBAM model, which often is ignored by people who don’t really know the model well, is what they called a practice profile. And essentially it was a rubric that identified what are the essential components of the innovation. In other words, without these components this innovation wouldn’t be this innovation.

Alice continues her explanation of how the Concerns Based Adoption Model, particularly the notion of the Practice Profile, influenced the creation of the Induction with Mentoring Toolkit:

For me, the heart of that document was… A practice profile! What does a high quality program look like? What are the essential components? What are some things that we want there that we think are necessary but not necessarily essential? And what do they look like in action? At the end we came out with what does in initiating program look like? What is a developing program look like? What is a mature program look like? And that seem to make sense to us. Because if we wanted to document the could help people see what they were going to do and then they could say so in the beginning we ought to be doing these things in these things.

The team submitted a completed version of the toolkit to the New Hampshire Department of Education in 2002 after having worked for nearly two years on the project. In addition to the toolkit being distributed to districts for their use, the facilitator of the toolkit task force organized a group around the same time for mentors in New Hampshire to come together several times a year to discuss their roles, talk through challenges of mentoring, as well as talk provide solutions and ideas for their programs. The New Hampshire Mentors’ Network met for over 10 years with its last meeting in the fall of 2015.

In 2004, grant money through the state of New Hampshire (from federal funds) became available through a Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant for districts to apply for and if received, provided funds for schools to begin induction and mentoring programs. There were about 6 school districts who applied for money and committed to the process of the grant. One
stipulation of receiving the grant money was for participants (mentors and mentees in the newly established programs) to fill out a survey about their experiences. Districts also produced reports on the implementation of the new programs including mechanisms for evaluating and making adjustments to the program. The grants were available to districts for nearly three years. However, only a few of the districts who had received money from the TQE grant were able to continue the mentoring program after the grant ended. Alice remembers this time:

It helped a lot when the TQE money was there because it meant that grant money was available. And they could look at providing stipends, time for the committee to meet and do their work, substitutes, training, summer induction for new teachers. All the components that help build the program and make it a worthy program. When the TQE money went away, often what happened is that the, the program sort of limped along and the support dribbled away.

Although the New Hampshire Department of Education “recommends a well-specialized and formalized process of mentoring and support designed to improve the performance of all educators in the district” (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013, p. 33) there are no mandates to do so. Currently, there is some money available to school districts through Title II grants that can be used for induction and mentoring programs. The exact amount and long term availability monies is somewhat vague. The money available is not necessarily enough to fund the full development and implementation of mentoring program, meaning that the district would also need to have the ability to provide financial resources.

All of the districts in this study can trace the influence of the beginning of their programs back to Governor Shaheen’s 2000 symposium. Two of the districts in this study were directly involved in the toolkit and TQE grant process. Members from one district served on the Induction with Mentoring Toolkit task force, and a second district was a recipient of the TQE grant. All three districts have participated in the New Hampshire Mentors’ Network for at least
the past 5 years. Currently, one of the districts also provides professional development training for mentors from any district in the state. Many of the materials used in the mentor training are adapted from curriculum written by a company called WestEd. One of the reviewers of the Induction with Mentoring Toolkit, Susan Villani, has worked at WestEd for a number of years as well as published books about developing and sustaining mentoring programs within schools.

In sum, this section positions the three cases in this study as (1) developing from and sharing a common history, and (2) emerging from a similar definition of induction and mentoring supports. This is critical because it suggests, as Ragin (1997) argues is necessary in order to compare cases, that the three districts in the study are similar enough to be compared and contrasted. One concern of research is the ability to demonstrate a study’s internal validity when findings develop from participants’ views around certain constructs, such as teacher support. Qualitative research allows for there to be differences in understanding of an experiences with these constructs because these rich points offer insight into possible reasons for differences. However, the relationship among the districts in this study worked to ground the concept of mentoring but then allowed for close examination around the ways that programs were implemented and the contexts in which programs developed. This provided not only the ability to understand supports that were valued for beginning teacher learning but also an analysis of how different environments take up mentoring and teacher support in different ways. This impacted not only what supports were offered and valued by beginning teachers and their helpers but also how and why certain supports were valued more, less, or differently.
Common Roots of Participating Programs

The three districts in this study share a common historical root for their programs of teacher assistance. Each of them were heavily influenced by the Induction with Mentoring toolkit. The districts, and in particular the individuals who lead the programs, shared a common belief that induction and mentoring were two distinct ideas. Where induction is seen as the process of helping a new member to the teaching profession transition to their new role mostly by understanding their new environment (i.e., how to ask for or find classroom supplies, systems for grading), mentoring is perceived as the time, space, and process where focused attention is paid to components of professional learning that mostly pertain to classroom practices and knowledge. One participant described this distinction when she said that “induction is necessary but not sufficient” when thinking about the needs of new teachers (Alice).

Throughout the course of spending time in each district and interviews with participants, it became clear that this study was a case study of teacher mentoring. This was in part because of the method through which I became introduced to individuals and the common history of teacher assistance embodied by each district but also the way in which teacher mentoring was enacted. The districts in the study share core ideas about mentoring that enable comparison but also offer different contexts which allow for meaningful analysis and conclusions about the ways in which environments impact the mentoring programs.

Heart of What’s at Issue

The following section outlines a working hypothesis that guided the analysis of data as well as the variables that appeared to impact implementation and enactment of the mentoring programs in the districts. As noted in the previous chapter about how data was analyzed, several
working hypotheses iterations where considered. Across each of the districts, one idea emerged as being key for its impact on mentoring programs: the locus of accountability. Forwarding this as a potential unit of analysis, examining the way in which the notion of accountability operates within each district brought forth several variables that were also related to one another and appear to influence decisions about the mentoring programs: the embeddedness of the program and its ability to sustain other district functions. Further analysis of the relationship among these variables lead to the following proposition:

   It may be the case that a teacher mentoring program is more embedded in the function of a school district when school and district leadership feel accountable towards the program and the program is believed to sustain other functions and priorities of the school district. If this is the case, it may reflect the resources allocated to and services of the mentoring program.

   One puzzling idea was the notion of ‘value’ and whether or not this was an accurate description of what is at play across the cases. Is a mentoring program cut because it is no longer valued in a school district? After careful consideration, it did not appear that valuing or devaluing was quite the issue here. It can likely be asserted fairly confidently that if one was to ask school and district leadership, everyone would say that they valued teacher support. Instead, a likely and plausible explanation about what may explain decisions around and changes in a mentoring program can be characterized as changes in prioritization for funding from school and district leadership. Positioning school and district leadership in a way that suggests the viability of a program exists only through these individuals not only misrepresents the larger context of the way in which mentoring programs exist, but when thinking about the ways in which this study can be extended to other districts, it also potentially sets up leadership as a scapegoat for programmatic changes. While leadership plays a role in decisions about which programs to
fund, the factors that go into decision making in a school district (i.e., policy changes, changes in funding, personnel) are incredibly complex and goes beyond just leadership.

The notion of prioritization is a value-laden term, so even though the word ‘value’ is not explicitly mentioned in the above proposition, the notion of value is implied. I argue that the notion of value across the three cases manifests itself in other ways, one of which is how the mentoring program interacts, supports, and sustains other functions of the school district. As I will argue, a mentoring program may be prioritized if it is viewed to align with goals of other programs or the school district at large.

**Issue 1: Accountability**

I argue that the notion of accountability at play in this study has a twofold meaning, where one understanding of accountability contributes to the second. The first meaning of accountability refers to the way that leadership positions itself or is positioned in relation to the mentoring program. By this it is meant to refer to what kind of role leadership may play in decisions of, about, and for the mentoring program. This directly relates and contributes to the second meaning which refers to the sense of responsibility that leadership feels towards the mentoring of program. The second meaning is likely less observable in terms of active participation in the mentoring program, but is evident through such things like funding and resources.

The way that accountability is enacted by leadership of the school in relation to and towards a mentoring program also appears to exist along a spectrum. Each of the possible positions along the spectrum is put forth and then defined in Figure 4.
Figure 4: Spectrum of School or District Leadership Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-existent</th>
<th>Ignored</th>
<th>Reportive / Informative</th>
<th>Trusting</th>
<th>Co-Problem Solver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no communication between the leaders of the mentoring program and the school or district leadership. Leaders of the mentoring program generally operate the program independent of direction.</td>
<td>There is acknowledgement of the mentoring program as well as some communication between the leaders of the district/school and the program. There is no active direction or expectation to be involved from the leadership for the mentoring program leaders.</td>
<td>There may be frequent communication between school/district leaders and leaders of the mentoring program. Communication is characterized by one or both sides reporting out occurrences or needs of the program.</td>
<td>Communication between school/district leadership is frequent and expected from both groups. Communication is characterized by reporting out occurrences and needs of the program, and there is a supportive nature to the communication.</td>
<td>There is direct involvement of school or district leadership in the mentoring program. Communication is characterized by decision about the program being discussed by school/district leader as well as leaders of the mentoring program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues 2 and 3: Embeddedness and Sustaining

The two notions of embeddedness and sustaining are interrelated yet still distinct enough constructs to warrant separate spectrums. When thinking about the notion of embeddedness, this is referring to the contributions that the mentoring program as a singular entity make to overall function of the school or district as well as the way in which it is integrated into the district. Another way that embeddedness could be described is ‘the way a school or district does business’ as it refers to the assistance provided to beginning teachers. The notion of embeddedness is juxtaposed with that of sustaining where the construct of ‘sustaining’ refers to the ability or the perception of the ability of a mentoring program to support the work of other programs. The continuum of the issue of embeddedness is expanded in Figure 5 below.
Figure 5: Embeddedness of a Mentoring Program within a School or District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dysfunctional</th>
<th>Strained</th>
<th>Invisible</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Embraced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embeddedness is characterized by an active attempt to separate the mentoring program from the rest of the district</td>
<td>Embeddedness that is characterized by the mentoring program being forgotten but without intentionality.</td>
<td>Embeddedness that is characterized by the mentoring program being under utilized, but where leadership does not make an attempt to integrate the program.</td>
<td>Embeddedness that is characterized by active attempts to integrate the mentoring program with others in the district.</td>
<td>Embeddedness that is characterized by seamless and full integration among the mentoring program and others in the district.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the major differences between these two constructs is that embeddedness is focused on the ways that the program ‘co-mingles’ with other program on the same level. However, the notion of sustaining is focused on the ways in which the mentoring program provides a foundation for the existence or function of other program or priorities in the school district. For example, in the Bakerston and Garfield School Districts, the district mentors of those programs were also responsible for maintaining the professional development points of the mentees for further certification purposes. Had the mentors not take on this task, it would have needed to be provided by another person in the district because of the legal nature of the task. In this way, the mentoring programs were upholding vital functions of the school districts.

Figure 6: Ways in Which a Mentoring Program Sustains Other Functions District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of mentoring program misaligned with the goals/priorities of other programs/the district</th>
<th>Goals of mentoring program do not come into conflict with other programs or district goals</th>
<th>Goals of the mentoring program aligned with the goals/priorities of other programs/the district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


**Enactment of the Core Variables within the Cases**

This section discusses the ways in which the three core issues key at heart of this case study of mentoring are embodied and enacted in each of the cases. This section serves in part to rationalize the hypothesis put forth as well as lay the foundation for what may potentially influence the resources provided for and by the mentoring program. Each case is discussed and ‘located’ on each of the three spectra before proceeding to outline any other secondary variables that arise.

Throughout analysis, Bakerston has been puzzling for how it fits within the hypothesis and the other cases because of the change in the mentoring program. Claire, the district mentor, mentored new teachers, documented professional development points, and also ran workshops for personnel new to the district in order to teach them about district initiatives such as Response to Intervention. It could be posited that only one of those three functions that the district mentor fulfilled was seen as vital to the function of the school district: the person responsible for educating new personnel about initiatives. At the time of data collection, no participants knew what was to become of the mentoring program, but it is likely that two of the functions must be continued (documenting PDPs and a person in charge of continuing district instructional initiatives). It may be the case that these two functions may not have been considered enough to warrant a full time salary because these functions (which do sustain other parts of a district) could be assumed by other individuals in the district.

In terms of accountability, it would appear that Bakerston previously had a ‘trusting’ relationship with school and district leadership, but the accountability felt by leadership towards the program shifted over the years to that of ‘ignored’. In the beginning of the program and for many years, there was a trusting relationship between the school, district, and mentoring program
leadership that was characterized by frequent and systematic communication, and school and district leadership were both aware of the mentoring program acted in ways that suggested they support its existence and success. During the time of data collection, however, the relationship and accountability between school and district leadership and the mentoring program shifted where although there was still awareness of the program, there was less interaction with the program personnel on a regular basis or relying on the program. In this case, an ignored relationship also suggests a certain amount of complacency.

When the program started in Bakerston, it likely had a ‘helpful’ embeddedness characterization. One aspect that distinguishes an embraced problem from that of a helpful program is how systematic or thought out the connections between the program and other parts of the school district are. The district mentor, Claire, described speaking with principals about what they saw new teachers needing, but that these conversations came about because the mentor had also been a principal and so Claire believed that the principals still saw her as a colleague. This suggests a different kind of intentionality than what I believe we are seeing in the Garfield School District where it is part of the implementation of the program to have principal and assistant superintendent input. During the time of data collection, the program in Bakerston could be characterized as a strained mentoring program. This could be argued because there appeared to be a growing separation between the program and the school district where the mentoring program started to become less visible to district leadership.

In terms of sustaining other programs or goals, I argue that the goals of Bakerston’s mentoring program at the time of data collection may not have been perceived to align and sustain the goals of the other programs in the district. One feature that I think could be salient of this kind of sustaining relationship is that a program becomes compartmentalized from the
function of the rest of the district. Here the issue may be that when a program is perceived as serving a single, small function it may be called into question how impactful that function is, especially if it is perceived as being isolated from having an impact on anything else in the district.

In terms of accountability, I argue that the school and district personnel in Clarkesville has a reportive/informative mindset towards the mentoring program. This is characterized by school and district leadership communicating with the mentors for purposes of informing (e.g., who will be part of the mentoring program for upcoming years), but not utilizing one another for problem solving or program improvement. Clarkesville likely has an invisible mentoring program. As mentioned previously, I believe that Bakerston had a strained embeddedness because of the active attempt at separation, but the situation is distinct in Clarkesville. One of the mentors in Clarkesville reported that she felt that administrators liked to mention the mentoring program when they were trying to hire someone new, but that the mentors felt like the administrators didn’t do much more in terms of support. I believe that what we saw in Clarkeville is an under utilized mentoring program, or a program that may be mentioned conveniently.

Clarkesville is the unique case because it did not employ a full time district mentor and was the least expensive of the three cases to fund the mentoring program. In terms of sustaining other programs or goals, I argue that the goals of Clarkeville’s mentoring program do not come into conflict with district goals. As I mentioned before, I think that one feature that characterizes this sustaining relationship (particularly in Clarkesville) is that the program is not perceived as taking away from the existence of another program. When initially considering the spectrum of sustaining, the ends were the clearest (goals aligned or misaligned), but this did not appear to be
the situation in Clarkesville. With 6 mentors, the program was estimated to cost less than $10,000 a year to support. The program is not misaligned with the goals of the district or other programs, but there also was not evidence that the mentoring program explicitly supported or aligned with other programs’ goals in the district. Instead, it was likely the case the Clarkesville exists in a sort of ‘neutral zone’ where the program requires such little money to run (as compared to the other cases) that I do not think it is viewed as taking away from other functions right now. In Clarkesville the program may be viewed as not coming into conflict with other programs or priorities, but it also may not be viewed as enhancing or sustaining another function of the school district.

The Garfield School District is characterized by school and district leadership that have a co-problem solver relationship with the district mentor and a co-problem solver approach towards the mentoring program. The features that are particularly salient suggesting that there is a co-problem solver mentality is that the district mentor meets on a regular basis with school and district leadership to discuss the needs of the teachers and the program. What characterizes a co-problem solver approach is frequent and regular communication as well as well defined roles. For example, school principals do not discuss evaluations of teachers but rather speak in generalities of what they think their new teachers might need (i.e., more observations, professional development opportunities). The assistant superintendent took an active role in supporting the district mentor through regular meetings and being a co-collaborator in talking through the needs of the program. However, the district mentor was also trusted to be the primary decision maker for the program.

In terms of embeddedness Garfield most likely can be described as having an embraced program. This is evidenced by the district coordinator reporting how much she felt that
principals (in particular) relied on her program to provide the support for new teachers. What this suggests is a mindset within a school district of seeing the mentoring program as ‘the way we do business’ and the interactions between the district coordinator, principals, and assistant superintendent came to be seen as the norm rather than the exception. The way that Garfield’s district embraced the mentoring program may also be a function of the belief that the program is capable of supporting another initiative reported to be problematic and critical: teacher retention. Because of this belief about how Garfield’s mentoring program can support other initiatives, the program aligned with and sustained the goals of other programs. The superintendent has stated that a focus on teacher retention is a priority of the district, and the mentoring program is seen as positively contributing to sustaining the goal of retaining more teachers. One characteristic of this type of sustained relationship is that by having a mentoring program, it is not perceived that other priorities are lost or compromised. Rather, by having a mentoring program, other programs may not need to exist or the work of other programs, goals, and priorities may actually be eased.

Table 2 below brings together and locates each of the cases along the spectra of the three core issues.

**Table 2: Orienting the Three Cases Within the Core Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Embeddedness</th>
<th>Sustaining (other functions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bakerston School District</strong></td>
<td>Ignored</td>
<td>Strained</td>
<td>Not Aligned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarkeville School District</strong></td>
<td>Reportive/Informative</td>
<td>Invisible</td>
<td>Not in Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garfield School District</strong></td>
<td>Co-problem Solver</td>
<td>Embraced</td>
<td>Aligned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

74
Impact of Core Issues on Resources

The previous section was making a case for how the three primary variables from a potential hypothesis were enacted within and across each of the three cases in this study. Also at question in the working hypothesis is how the enactment of the variables impacts the resources that are allocated to mentoring programs. Bakerston and Clarkesville offer rich contexts for understanding the impact of the case and context on the resources. When thinking about the ways in which accountability, embeddedness, and sustaining other programs impacts the resources of the mentoring program in Bakerston, as the program became more strained with the priorities of the school district, it may be the case that the district could no longer justify the large cost of the program (a full teacher’s salary). Clarkesville’s mentoring program exists only in slightly tighter accordance with the rest of the district than Bakerston, but a significant difference is the amount of money that the district spends for the program. In Clarkesville, it could be the situation that because of the relatively small amount of money that the district spends on the mentoring program it is not seen as interfering with the other priorities of the district, thus actually supporting its embeddedness and the sense of accountability towards the program by leadership.

Garfield is the district with the most amount of funding dedicated to the mentoring program, and this is the also the program that has higher amounts of accountability, embeddedness, and perception of sustaining other priorities. Here, it can be argued that the cost of the program is seen to be justified because of the benefits that it is perceived to provide to the district. One other difference between Garfield and Bakerston and Clarkesville is that Garfield uses a mentoring model that blends that of the other two cases: a full time district mentor as well as mentors who also serve as full time teachers. If the program were to begin to come to be seen
as being less aligned with district goals, it could be the situation that there is the possibility of eliminating parts of the program but not all of it, bringing the cost down to a level that would be seen as being in line with the benefits that it provides. Bakerston did not have this possibility because the model that it used was a full time mentor model, so eliminating a part of the program meant eliminating the entire district mentor’s salary and therefore the mentoring program in its entirety. This could suggest that if mentoring programs are concerned with viability, having a program with multiple facets that can change if the needs of the school district change is key. For example, Garfield could eliminate the full time coordinator position but still be able to have classroom teachers as mentors, or Clarkesville could decrease the number of mentors who serve in their part time capacity. This is not to say that the function of the program would not be impacted or hurt, but that the programs could continue for some amount of time in a different state of existence.

**Relationship between Issues and Implementation of Mentoring Programs: Emerging Trends**

Through analysis of the variables and observation how they are at play and impact the resources of the mentoring programs, there emerged several trends. These emergent trends served to understand and contextualize later findings about the supports that were able to be offered for beginning teachers, the implementation of such supports, why and in what ways supports were valued by novice teachers.

1) It seemed as though the highest functioning mentoring program exists when school and district leadership have a co-problem solver mentality of accountability towards the program; when the program is embraced in the function of the school district; and when
the goals of the mentoring program align with and sustain other goals or priorities in the
classroom. This is not to argue that in order to function, mentoring programs must be
characterized on the highest end of the spectrum. When looking at the start of
Bakerston’s program, it began on a bit different part of the spectrum than Garfield
(Bakerston = trusting, helpful, and sustaining), and the program existed for 11 years. It
looks as though the viability of mentoring programs are in trouble when there become
active attempts to isolate, separate, and compartmentalize the mentoring program from
the rest of the district’s functions.

2) It appeared that movement along the spectra of the three variables is iterative, subtle, and
complex. By this it is meant that there does not appear to be a drastic change in one
variable that then impacts a change in the other two variables. In the case of Bakerston,
school and district leadership turned over and different feelings of accountability towards
the mentoring program developed, likely a more neutral one. The district mentor spoke
about how her relationship with each new superintendent was slightly different to the
point that with the current superintendent, she did not request a meeting in order to
present her program. This was likely the impetus for the mentoring program being seen
as not supporting other goals of the school district and then, in turn, not being as fully
integrated into the district. However, the change in accountability felt by school and
district leadership occurred slowly, and during this time, the district also likely underwent
cycles of changes in how the program was perceived.

3) Changes in the variables’ spectra are likely very subtle. Programs that seemed to start out
“higher” on each of the spectra likely take longer time to fully disentangle the program
from the normal function of the school district than a mentoring program that starts out in a more neutral position.

4) While there may be many combinations along the spectra that would suggest a viable program (i.e., trusting, invisible, aligned; co-problem solver, helpful, neutral) it is likely not the case that extremes of different spectra can exist and there be an expectation that the program will survive. For example, it may be the case that leadership demonstrates a trusting relationship and belief of their personal accountability towards the mentoring program but then it is unlikely that the district has a dysfunctional embeddedness in which the mentoring program is underconnected or overly responsible to other programs in the school district. While this may be the case for a short while, it appeared that it could not be the case for very long before there will be a change in how leadership approaches their accountability to the mentoring program.

5) As long as there is a high degree of accountability, embeddedness, and belief that the mentoring program is sustaining other functions, a certain degree of resources seemed to be able to be justified. When the program is perceived to have lower amounts of embeddedness or the inability to support other program, a higher “price tag” for the mentoring programs seems not to be tolerated. Here, it also may be the case that one of the ways a mentoring program could be seen to be at odds with other programs in the district is if they have more resources allocated to them but lower levels of embeddedness and accountability. I hypothesize that the placement on the spectra of accountability, embeddedness, and sustaining other functions establishes a range of acceptable, justified, and tolerated amounts of resources that will be allocated to a mentoring program. As the
placement on the spectra change, it could be the case that the range of resources also change.

Emergence of Secondary Issues

Examining how the working hypothesis is at play in each of the cases brought about several (aforementioned) trends that helps explain what is happening in terms of the viability, function, and sustaining of the mentoring programs in this study. These trends also highlight key, secondary issues that influenced by the way that the hypothesis is realized in each case.

Mentoring Model

The first of the secondary issues that is at play across the cases is the way in which the mentoring program of each district is structured. When speaking of ‘model’ it is meant in particular the person or people who were responsible for carrying out the general function of the program. Garfield used a combination of a full time district coordinator and full time classroom teachers who are paid a stipend to be mentors. Bakerston used a single, full time person model, and Clarkesville used a multiple, stipend-paid people model. Disentangling the notion of a model from that of resources, one of the reasons that this variable seems to be key is that the more flexible the model is to changes, the more likely it is to continue to be congruous with the priorities of the district.

Money

It seems as though the more money that was dedicated to a program, the higher the expectations were for the program. Expectations came in the form of inputs or outputs. By
inputs I mean that high expectations for a program could require that the mentoring program be responsible for quite a few structures like mentoring, monthly meetings, and professional learning communities. By outputs is meant the kind of expectations that a district may hold for a program to produce through the implementation of a program (e.g., high teacher rankings on evaluations; student achievement results). It looked as though the programs in this study included districts that relied generally on input expectations. However, it also seems like programs who had a higher number of resources dedicated to them had higher expectations for program ‘evaluation.’ By evaluation, programs were expected to audit themselves and their performance. This was not a stated expectation that was reported by any mentors, mentees, or principals. However, some kind of program evaluation was present in all cases. Programs with more resources had more frequent program evaluation, but all cases used evaluation to inform program improvement.

Size of Program

The sizes of the program appeared to be impacted by several factors. The first factor was the district’s philosophy about who should be part of the mentoring program. For example, a district’s mentoring program may only include teachers who are new to the profession or in their first year in the district. During data collection, the three districts included in their mentoring program not only teachers who were new to the profession of teaching but also new to the district. Teachers who were in their first year of teaching (new to the profession) were supported for 2 years, while teachers who were new to the district but had previous teaching experience were often part of the programs for 1 year.
In Clarkesville, decisions around who was going to participate in the mentoring program were sometimes limited by the availability of mentors. Some teachers were recommended for a third year of teaching, but the district was unable to provide such a service because there were not enough mentors, and they would often prioritize teachers with less experience or new to the profession or district. This is the second factor that impacts the size of the program: the availability of mentors. This factor may mask itself as the availability of mentors but could also speak to the model of the program utilized for mentoring. Thinking back to the Clarkesville example, this case had the possibility of expanding its program by training more mentors to serve a greater number of teachers. However, Clarkesville was likely also limited in its ability to recruit more mentors because it used a model of mentoring where the mentors were also full time classroom teachers, placing immense demands on the mentors’ time. Garfield used a combination model of mentoring such that if a teacher was recommended for a third year of mentoring but a part time mentor could not be hired, there was the possibility of the district coordinator supporting the teacher.

The third factor that seemed to impact the size of the program was the number of financial resources made available to the program. I believe that the number of resources available for mentor stipends or salaries is related to the way in which the program was prioritized or believed to sustain other goals of the district. For example, it appeared that the mentoring program in Garfield is believed to support the retention of teachers. Because of this, participation in the program is considered critical. During one meeting with a principal, the district coordinator and a principal were trying to figure out how to provide a person with the opportunity for an additional year in the program, but this was causing some difficulty because of lack of mentors. The conversation was around who the program could recruit to serve as a
mentor. A similar situation happened in Clarkesville, but the conversation ended up being more about which of the current mentors felt that they could take on a second mentee.

**Analysis of Research Questions by Case**

In this section, I will report the findings around my research questions by case as a means to support a cross-case analysis in the following section. Before outlining what participants reported valuing for their learning, there are some important considerations. First, for all of the cases in this study, teacher support was implemented primarily via a mentoring program. All of the cases also distinguished between the notions of ‘induction’ and ‘mentoring.’ I argue that this distinction came from a common historical connection among the cases and their association at a state level New Hampshire Mentors’ Network. Where induction was considered the more formal onboarding and introduction to the profession of teaching, mentoring was considered to be the active, professional growth component of familiarizing teachers to the profession and school district.

Second, districts were recruited for participation in the study because they were determined to have a teacher support program of some kind. The initial thinking behind my study was that I would contribute to the literature by investigating other forms of teacher support that might be supporting teacher learning because it had been established by prior literature that mentoring was prevalent and viewed as important. When I began my study and realized that my inquiry of teacher support was also around the notion of mentoring, I began to question the ways in which my study may contribute to the literature. What I found (which will be expanded in much greater detail later one) is that the term ‘mentoring’ and ‘mentoring program’ actually took on an umbrella meaning in that the program was responsible for much more than a typical
conceptualization of mentoring. In each of the three programs in the study, mentors and the mentoring programs took up the responsibilities of such tasks as new teacher orientation prior to the start of the year; planning monthly or bi-monthly professional development workshops; maintained records of professional development points; and orientated new staff members to functions of the school district (e.g. emergency procedures, locating curriculum and class materials, and human resource paperwork). In previous literature, teacher supports such as professional development workshops were not included in the activity of mentoring, and because the participants in this study identified mentoring as encompassing multiple activities, this study can uniquely contribute to the literature.

Third, one challenge that I believe I faced as an interviewer was how to ask about teachers’ and mentors’ feelings and values towards certain components of the mentoring program without suggesting such components as being supports. For example, if I asked how teachers viewed their principals as being supportive of their learning, how do I know that participants previously viewed their principal as a support and not because my question made them think that they should view their principal this way? I found that I needed to make some adjustments to my interview protocols to include even more open-ended questions and lines of inquiry such as “tell me about your principal” or “how do you ask for help?” In most interview cases I am confident that I did not lead participants to see relationships or supports where they did not believe they existed.

Fourth, as I analyzed the data from the cases, I believe that there were clear examples of what teachers found helpful for their learning as well as things that teachers did not find helpful for their learning. To me, reports from teachers and mentors about what was not viewed as
useful gave me almost as much insight about what was valued for teacher learning as its positive counterpart.

_Bakerston School District: A Case of an Increasingly Strained Mentoring Program – District Leadership Relationship_

Each year the district mentor, Claire, conducted a survey where she asked teachers to anonymously reflect on their year in the mentoring program and respond to questions about suggested improvements. The survey was qualitative in nature, and Table 4 outlines responses from the end of the 2013 – 2014 school year (the year prior to this study’s data collection).

Table 3: Bakerston’s Mentoring Program Results from Mentee Survey, 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Support</th>
<th>Experience of Teacher (years)</th>
<th>Written Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I benefited most from learning about the district; where do I go and who do I see.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-One Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“The one-on-one support offered was invaluable. I came here and started with little support and [the mentor] was someone in my corner. She helped me reflect and grow as a young teacher. I know in part because of [the mentor’s] help in this program I am a more engaging and confident teacher.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Observations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Getting the view of others is always productive and a source of objective adjustment to effective management and/or procedures. Helped build personal confidence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-One Support</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>“You have been so supportive and available.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Meetings</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>“I have benefitted from having a mentor group like this as it can be overwhelming your first year.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“The orientation was helpful. It gave the staff the opportunity to get to know other new teachers in the district and become familiar with the district. [The mentor] was very supportive”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and helpful. Observations always provided useful feedback. One suggestion is to have a 1 year program instead of 2 years... it can sometimes be difficult to get to meetings every month.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-on-One Support</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>“The mentoring was helpful because it allowed the new staff to get to know each other and have a reliable support group.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formative Observations</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>“The formative observations were the most helpful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Meetings</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>“I wonder if meeting more frequently would build a better support group. Perhaps every other week for 1 hour rather than once a month for 2 hours.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I do think that the monthly meetings were very helpful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-One Support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I really have appreciated the support and feedback. Having the visits and open lines of communication was really important.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 15

Mentoring. Mentoring was a valued structure of beginning teacher support in Bakerston.

In Bakerston, mentoring was defined as the one-to-one interaction between the district mentor and a mentee around such activities as classroom observations and mentor-mentee meetings about the observations. This is not altogether surprising given that it was one of the primary structures of teacher support that the district offered and the district mentor was also the person who developed and ran the program from its inception for eleven years. What was striking were the reasons that the mentoring program seemed to be valued in Bakerston.

First, mentoring was valued because it allowed opportunities for the mentor to model certain instructional or classroom practices that teachers felt were applicable, immediately useful, and practical. In terms of relating to the framework of teacher learning, this particular structure offered a growth (change) in teacher practice. Second, mentoring was valued because it allowed for individual and concentrated attention to each teacher’s needs. This individualized
teacher development plan was valued not only for the instructional and classroom support, but arguably even more the for emotional and professional development support. Both the teacher and district mentor interviewed talked about one of the greatest growths that they saw in beginning teachers was the ability to communicate with students, families, and colleagues.

The district mentor highly valued the ability for her to be present in her mentees’ classrooms. From the beginning of the program Claire made it a priority “to get into the teachers’ classrooms,” in part, because she herself was learning how to observe teachers. She approached classrooms observations primarily from two perspectives. First, was what Claire called ‘drop-ins’ which were meant to be shorter and less formal (than the second kind of observation approach) where she would provide the teacher with written feedback as she left the classroom and likely e-mailed later on. This is contrasted to the second kind of classroom observation, formative coaching cycles. In formative coaching cycles, Claire would meet with a mentee prior to the classroom observation where the teacher would preview the lesson plan or student materials as well as discuss the objective of the lesson. Claire and the teacher would also set a goal for the observation. After the observation, Claire would type notes from her time in class into the rubric of the Danielson Framework (Danielson, 2007) that was applicable to the observation, and then Claire and the teacher would meet to discuss the observation with a focus on progress toward the learning goal.

Megan specifically spoke about appreciating the handwritten sheets that she received from her mentor during the observation:

It was nice having someone who was going to support you in whatever. She would give it [the slip of paper with handwritten feedback] to me afterwards or we would debrief a little bit. And it wasn’t necessarily a lesson that I had planned out when the principal comes to review you and you’re like ‘ok, this is my lesson plan’. I have it all planned out. It was like she would drop in and be like ‘hey,
can I check out this lesson?’ And it felt a lot more casual and just in general she’s very like kinda has that tone to her, very relaxed so it helps.

Megan contrasted her observations by her mentor with that of her principal when she reported that:

I was evaluated and we didn’t meet before we didn’t meet after. She just kinda came in. She was late my lesson. She left early. She typed up [stuff]. Sent it to me I edited it and sent it back to her. Then I signed it. Even when she came to evaluate me she canceled three times and I was ready to have her.

Megan’s experience with evaluation was frustrating in part because of the striking differences between the implementation of observation cycles used by the principal and her mentor. The above quotation by Megan highlighted that she had certain expectations for more formal observations and their ability to be a learning tool and growth opportunity.

Networks. A second structure that both the mentor and teacher spoke about, as well as was reflected in the end-of-year surveys, was having a network of fellow teachers with which to connect. This structure is quite broad and detailed because there are several embedded ways that teachers and the district mentor spoke about connecting with one another, but the general premise and relationship across these structures was that teachers were networking with one another. In particular, these networks reported as being valued were among peers of colleagues, distinct from the assistance of a mentor. The three network structures that are discussed in the following paragraphs are bi-monthly workshops, online networks, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Claire, the district mentor, was the one who planned and facilitated the after school workshops for beginning teachers. These occurred either monthly for new teachers or every
other month for more experienced and second year teachers. The district mentor spoke about the intentionality of her design around these workshops, trying to tailor them to teachers’ needs and responding to informal and formal feedback from teachers about each workshop’s usefulness. Such topics for the workshops included classroom management, a review of the district’s evaluation system, and teaching techniques as outlined by Robert Marzano (e.g. Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003).

When speaking to the teacher about these workshops, she had a vague recollection of any of the topics, saying “I think there was one on…” The teacher went on to enthusiastically talk about how she did enjoy going to the workshops because it allowed for opportunities for her to collaborate, interact, and talk with other teachers. Specifically this teacher recalled “I don’t really remember the topics, but I did like to go because it gave me a chance to talk with other new teachers” (Megan). What this suggests is that having a network of fellow professionals come together and think through the issues of teaching was highly valued. However, I would also postulate that it was not simply getting teachers together in a social setting without an agenda or vision for the time together. Rather, what was valued was having a balanced collaboration time where there was enough of a structure to the meeting time for it to be purposeful but also enough flexibility to allow for teacher talk and not solely a facilitator lead workshop.

One structure that Megan spoke about in particular as being helpful was having an online connection with other teachers. This particular connection was not provided through the district but was sought out and created by the teacher herself. The teacher created an account where she would post lesson plans and describe unit plans, available for others to access. One reason that the teacher reported appreciating this kind of connection was that she gained ideas from other
teachers of her similar content to incorporate into her own classroom. Even more so she talked about gaining a sense of purpose and pride knowing that someone else may be looking at her work and finding it useful for their classroom. I speculate that in a way this transferred into a higher degree of confidence for her in the classroom, knowing that her work was appreciated by others. This particular structure appeared to be related to growth in teacher knowledge because it had an impact on curriculum development, lesson planning, and activity implementation.

In Bakerston, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were not a program that was run or managed by the mentoring program, but it was a structure that the teacher reported finding valuable. As in many schools or districts, PLCs are a time and space for teachers of similar grade levels or teaching subjects to gather and problem solve about particular issues, and this is district follows that line of practice. Megan reported that when she began teaching in the district, teachers in her content did not have a PLC, and so she took the initiative to form one. She was able to connect with elementary and fellow middle school teachers, but at the time of interviews, she had yet to be able to encourage high school teachers to join the PLC. She reported that, to a certain extent, she felt lost with how her own curriculum in middle school should progress because she was not clear how it connected to high school content. As a teacher who tried to be very innovative in her curriculum and her classroom (e.g., creating a mountain bike unit for her class), what this perceived lack of connectivity between the middle and high school curricula suggests is that this teacher felt very isolated in her desire to understand the broader sequencing of her content. For her learning, she felt very disconnected and having the ability to only go so far in her only classroom practices. What I believe is also being highlighted in her valuing of PLCs is the notion that content matters (teaching content) when we think about new teacher learning and structures that are meant to encourage learning.
Principals. There was a range of feelings towards the perceptions of how helpful principals were to the learning of teachers. Megan reported feeling inclined to ask the principal for help, specifically around matters of family communication. However, the teacher also reported feeling sometimes uncomfortable not knowing how the principal might react to certain situations or feeling like the principal did not ‘have her back.’ Megan also reported that she felt less inclined to go to a second principal for help because the teacher perceived that the principal did not respond to questions in a timely manner or have helpful feedback.

Listening to the teacher speak about her relationship and reliance on her principals, it seemed that the teacher began teaching feeling a sense of trust and belief of helpfulness towards her principal but this feeling waned over the course of several years. Inconsistent levels of support encouraged teachers not perceiving the principal as a person who they trusted and so did not approach for help. One particular time that had the potential to be a learning event for teachers was the yearly teacher evaluation. Megan spoke about an inconsistency in observations, cancelling observations, and feedback during evaluation meetings that was either so far removed from the actual observation or sent via e-mail led her to feeling that evaluations were not learning times. What seems to be an important conclusion around principal support is that disposition of individual principals is critical. What is meant by this is that principals were not inherently seen as unhelpful, and I would argue that actually, principals are in a position to encourage and support teacher learning. My interviews in this district did not necessarily lead me to understand exactly what the disposition factors for principals were beyond that of emotional and academic constancy.

Classroom Assistants. One other structure that was highlighted by the district mentor as somewhat hindering the growth of new teacher development was having a classroom assistant.
Claire spoke about working with a new teacher who had a classroom assistant in her class, and quite a few conversations and goals for the new teacher were around how to leverage the help of the second adult in the classroom. What the district mentor reported being particularly difficult for the new teacher was learning how to manage another adult while simultaneously learning how to manage the students in the classroom.

It appeared that in this particular case, the responsibility of supervision of classroom assistants fell to the classroom teacher. The difficulties that the mentor discussed suggest that the solution does not necessarily lie in eliminating classroom assistants altogether but rather rethinking how assistants could be differently supervised and incorporated into classrooms. I believe that this structure is important in thinking about encouraging the learning of beginning teachers because it demonstrates how a structure that intends to help can in practice turn out to overwhelm the attention of a new teacher. This possibly means that a new teacher may take longer to grow in either practice or knowledge if they are engaged in thinking about to incorporate classroom assistants.

Clarkeville School District: A Case of Grass Roots Mentoring by Full Time Teachers

The mentors in Clarkeville conducted an anonymous survey of the nine participants (although seven participants responded) in the program at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. The results are displayed below in Table 4.
### Table 4: Clarkeville’s Mentoring Program Results from Mentee Survey, 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found the mentoring program beneficial.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Induction with Mentoring Handbook was helpful.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group monthly meetings were beneficial.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor was able to meet my needs as an educator.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The frequency of meetings with my mentor met my needs.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor and I were compatible.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 7

Mentoring. The district of Clarkeville had the smallest of the three cases in terms of the mentoring program. The program served 9 teachers, and none of them were actually in their first year of teaching. Most of the teachers in the program were more experienced educators who had changed districts; Clarkeville offered mentoring to teachers who were new to the district as well as new to teaching. Mentoring was the primary structure offered to new teachers, and there was some flexibility in the number of years that teachers could be in the program based on their needs and the availability of mentors.

One of the district mentors, Karen, reported her observation that beginning teachers needed the most help with classroom management, but there were two things that made it difficult for her to help teachers with this. First, Karen reported that even though she and her mentee were able to meet weekly, because she was also had full time teaching responsibilities, it was sometimes difficult to observe her mentees’ classes. This was also reflected in the district’s mentoring program survey which reports that 2 out of 7 mentees reported being observed by their mentor (Clarkeville Mentor Program Survey, 2015). She felt that this made it difficult to
help her mentees improve and reflect on their practice because most of the conversation during the mentoring meetings was self-report on the part of the teacher. The mentor felt as though she was talking through issues ‘blind’ because even if the conversation produced a goal for the mentee, she was possibly not going to be able to observe it and rely on how the novice teacher thought the goal was implemented and evaluate its success.

Second, the district utilized a reflective mentoring model (similar to other districts in this study), and Karen reported that she felt limited in her ability to give direct feedback. The mentor spoke about how sometimes beginning teachers “don’t know what they don’t know” (Karen) so expecting them to be able to look at their classroom and diagnose the issue or problem may be unrealistic. Karen reported that one of the greatest growths she observed in a teacher was when she provided feedback that she felt was more direct and step by step outlined with how to improve. What this possibly highlights is that when teachers are struggling with an area such as classroom management, having the flexibility to give more direct feedback from the mentor, including specific action items, may be useful in changing teacher practice, one of the definitions of teacher learning used in this study.

Workshops. Teachers in Clarkesville’s mentoring program met monthly after school to partake in a mentor planned workshop. An (anonymous) end of year survey conducted by the mentors suggested that teachers found more value in workshop topics that were practical and immediately useful such as emergency procedures (n = 4) and My Learning Plan (n = 3). According to the survey, teachers did not find workshops as valuable that could be described as more theory based such as using report card software (n = 1) and the special education process (n = 1). Results of the survey around topics for mentee workshops are displayed in Figure 7.
At an end of year meeting, mentors discussed possible changes to their workshop schedule and topics. This included such as ideas as scheduling workshops every other month, and bringing in new topics such as a review of the school district’s teacher evaluation framework. One other suggestion that was highlighted from the survey was that the timing of workshops during the year was critical to consider. For example, teachers suggested that some workshops that occurred later in the fall semester such as Lesson Planning and Using Gradebook would have possibly been more useful earlier in the year. This appears to support the idea that teachers valued practical and immediately useful workshops. This was likely in part because the outcome or product of the workshop felt more tangible or able to impact the next day’s class.
Mentors also spoke about the possibility of incorporating more information about the Danielson framework, the district’s evaluation framework. Karen reported that “the staff has not had a training on Danielson even though they use the rubric.” She saw this as inhibiting novice teachers ability to understand what is expected of them and offering a monthly workshop that allowed time to review and talk about the rubrics and language could be valuable.

Garfield School District: A Case of a District Wide Integrated Mentoring Program

Mentoring. The structure of mentoring was quite valued in Garfield. The district coordinator, Hannah, placed a high priority on matching the content and grade level of the mentee with that of the mentor, and mentees reported valuing this. This was particularly true at the middle and high school levels. In interviews of teachers who were beyond their first year of teaching, they reported feeling that they no longer needed feedback around classroom management, and instead, were looking to grow as instructors in their particular content. One high school science teacher, Miriam, spoke about her belief that her content required such specific kind of knowledge, that she needed assistance from someone who could speak to how to instruct the specialized content rather than in general terms.

The district of Garfield also offered beginning special education teachers a mentor who was a former special education teacher and administrator. The belief behind this was that special education teachers needed assistance with specialized knowledge, including not only instructing students but also special education law, policies, and procedures. In Garfield, the special education mentor and teachers reported valuing the fact that they would be partnered together for two years, where the focus of the first year was more heavily on policy and the focus of the second year was on teaching content to students. It seemed that one reason this structure was
valued was because there a great deal of intentionality and attention to the trajectory of growth for a special education teacher. In other words, the support that was offered to special education teachers did not appear to be haphazard but well planned and thought out.

The district of Garfield utilized a reflective mentoring model that places an emphasis on the mentor visiting the mentee’s classroom to collect data, present the information to the mentee, and then ask the mentee a series of questions to guide the them towards what they think may be at issue in class. This was actually the model of mentoring that was used across the three cases. Most of the participants in the study were familiar only with this type of mentoring, so I did not necessarily ask them to compare reflective mentoring to other types. Through the course of interviews, however, two participants talked about times when they wished the district allowed for another type of mentoring.

First, Tilly, one of the participants who worked exclusively with beginning special education teachers spoke about her work with teachers and her belief that sometimes more direct feedback was needed. She said “I have been given permission to use more coaching than reflective mentoring” (Tilly). She thought that this switch in support model was important because special education teachers needed very specific knowledge around such procedures as how to run a meeting with families, how to use the online portal to write IEPs, and how to document the implementation of accommodations. Tilly spoke about her belief that the switch in mentoring approach allowed her to be more direct with beginning teachers and increase their knowledge faster.

Second, another participant, Penelope, spoke very highly about the trust and confidence she had for her mentor. However, she also said, “I wish that sometimes my mentor could just give me advice, but I know that they’re not allowed to do that. Sometimes I know what I don’t
know how to do but I don’t know how to fix it” (Penelope). These words suggest a possible limitation to the reflective mentoring model: teachers may not be able to produce best practices because of lack of experience so have the possibility of continuing or implementing teaching practices that are ineffective, misguided, or based on faulty reasoning. It appears that teachers sometimes want specific feedback about a certain problem and not just reflective mentoring. What this experience also suggests is that when we feel as though we must strictly adhere to one model of support, there is the possibility of missed learning opportunities. In particular, there could be moments where teachers are looking for advice about different teaching techniques to try that could change not only their teaching practice but also their knowledge of the classroom.

In was important to the district mentor, Hannah, that teachers were familiar with the Danielson framework because this was the district’s evaluation tool for teachers. During new teacher orientation prior to the start of the school year, there is a workshop on learning about the Danielson rubrics, focusing on developing common understanding for the language of the rubric. Alice echoed Hannah’s focus on language as being important when she says:

common language and structures are powerful. New teachers may not know the language so this could be seen as isolating especially if you are scared to ask for help. Part of the help that a mentor can offer then is how to understand the language of an evaluation.

(Alice)

In working especially with struggling teachers, Hannah uses the rubrics and the language from the rubrics to develop goals and highlight progress.

Table 5 below displays the results from a mentee survey conducted by Garfield’s district mentoring coordinator, Hannah. These results combine mentee’s reports both about their feedback around mentoring practices (one-on-one work with a mentor) as well as professional
development workshops which will be outlined and described in further detail in the next section.

Table 5: Garfield’s Mentoring Program Results from Mentee Survey, 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Induction with Mentoring Program</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Not Useful</th>
<th>Somewhat Useful</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Mentor Meetings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly IWM Meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Coaching Cycles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Teacher Orientation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=30

The district mentoring coordinator also collected open ended responses from the program participants around the question “In what way has your participation in the IWM program impacted your professional practice?” Results are displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Results to Open Ended Survey Responses, Garfield School District, 2014-2015

- Goal Setting- I feel that I have had an opportunity to sit with my mentor and create goals for each quarter. So I do spend some time with my mentor setting goals for the quarter and or the year too. Assessing- I have learned a little about formative assessment but not enough about how to create summative assessments. Knowledge of students- I learned the value of really taking the time at the beginning of the school year to get to know the children. The more I do this next year I think the fewer behavior problems I will have later on. Content Knowledge- I have learned a great deal about the common core standards. I have learned how to integrate them across curriculum content areas as well. Classroom environment and management- We have spent a lot of time on classroom management from observing classrooms.
- Classroom environment and management through Power of Our Words, and
knowledge of students through Danielson.

- Classroom organization
- The coaching cycle helped me reflect on my best practices and put emphasis on my goals for personal growth.
- I learned new classroom management skills and strategies.
- This program has exposed me to new ways of planning and teaching I may have not thought of on my own. It gave me support when I was struggling and gave me encouragement when I have felt like a complete failure. This program has given me support while planning for struggling learners and advice on how to work with challenging students.
- My participation in this program has helped me to ask for help. Previously this is not something I would typically do.
- I think the most important "take-aways" would be in planning and designing instruction, knowledge of students, and classroom management. Through mentoring, I have learned how to better plan and design instruction for my students. Fortunately, my mentor and I work in the same content area, in the same school. We meet weekly, not only to discuss any challenges that I am having, but also to plan. I have gotten so much better with my timing and pacing in my classes, and with how much I plan for my students on any given day. As for knowledge of students, I think I underestimated how important this was at the beginning of the year. I came in thinking that I could do one thing, and then had to think on my feet and change plans mid-lesson because of the students in my classroom.
- Planning and designing instruction has improved, along with classroom environment, largely based on conversations with my mentor. I learned to be more precise in what I asked of students.
- The classroom management training was the most useful for me. Seeing how simply having a complete lesson plan and materials ready before class makes things go so much more smoothly was simple yet effective. It always looked like the experienced teachers just knew what to do each class, but knowing the simple steps to make that happen really helped. I have been able to keep the students engaged and focus by having the proper plan and backup plans ready to go.

Networks. As part of the mentoring program in Garfield, teachers were provided with monthly or bi-monthly workshops, generally designed and facilitated by Hannah, the district mentoring coordinator. These workshops were grouped by experience level of the teachers, where first and second year teachers were grouped and the topics of the workshops were often different. The district mentor, Hannah, reported, “It’s not always about the topic. Sometimes I think that the teachers just need to get together and talk. I plan our workshops so that there is a
lot of time for collaboration” (Hannah). Survey data collected after each workshop and at the end of the year also suggest that, while teachers did find certain topics useful, they also appreciated the opportunity to talk through guided topics with other teachers at similar stages of their development. Penelope and Miriam both spoke about liking the bi-monthly meetings, but they also reported that she wished they did not take place during the school day. Miriam in particular reported that the responsibility of preparing for a substitute teacher actually caused a bit more stress because she had to think about her class through the eyes of another person. Being a beginning teacher, having to prepare for a substitute teacher to attend a workshop about improving as a teacher felt somewhat counterproductive.

Principals. There was a range of feelings towards principals as a source of teacher support. Some teachers reported that they felt their principal was a person to whom they could go for feedback or help, and the advice would be useful. Other teachers reported feeling that they did not find their principal’s feedback particularly useful because it did not necessarily present a challenge to their current stage of development and classroom performance or expertise. Across nearly all teachers interviewed in Garfield, there emerged a common theme regarding principal support: teachers crave academic feedback about their classes from their principals. Some teachers reported feeling disappointed when they felt that the principal could only provide feedback about classroom management and could not help with instructional or content related ideas. It also appeared that teachers generally saw their principals as being a source for assistance or support at the beginning of their teaching, and based on their interaction with their principal over the years, this feeling either waned or grew stronger.

What this suggests is that many beginning teachers may see their principal or the idea of the principalship as being a person who is the curriculum and instruction leader in the building.
In teachers interviewed who still viewed their principal as a source for support, I argue that this is the case because the teacher and the principal both viewed the role of the principalship similarly: as being one of the curriculum and instruction leader. I argue that teachers who had a growing frustration towards the help they received from their principal was in part because the teacher and the principal held different views of the principalship. Namely, teachers were looking for feedback about classroom practices and felt that those needs were not being met.

This is in no way to suggest that a principal ought to be the curriculum and instruction leader in a building. Rather, I argue that a teacher seeing the principal as a source for help is based more precisely on the principal and teacher having similar views and expectations towards the role of the principal. What struck me about the idea of the principal as being a source for teacher learning is that I began my research thinking that the principal would be the person providing the various supports that teachers would find valuable. What I found, however, is that teachers were looking to their principals to encourage their learning. They were looking to their principals for opportunities of support and challenge, and there was a certain level of disappointment or disillusionment when teachers felt like this was unmet.

Committee Responsibilities. The Garfield School District made it a policy several years ago that new teachers would not be asked to take on additional responsibilities. Hannah, the district’s mentor coordinator, described the policy in this way:

The district has a mandate that new teachers don’t have committee responsibilities or [athletic] coaching responsibilities. There was lots of resistance from the teacher’s union for this mandate even though the district’s principals and superintendent agreed to it. The union thought that the mandate unfairly kept new teachers from participating in activities.

In general, Hannah finds that most school and district administrators follow the guideline as a way to alleviate the extra tasks and demands on time for new teachers in the mentoring program.
Analysis and Findings of Research Questions Across Cases

Before presenting findings across the three cases, it is necessary to return to the theoretical framework in order provide a lens for organizing, supporting, and guiding the thinking of the cross-case analysis. There are three interrelated parts to the theoretical framework: a definition of teacher learning (Figure 9); a framework for understanding a continuum of teacher learning spanning from preservice through continuing professional development (Figure 10); and a theory of adult development that outlines conditions that encourage teacher learning (Figure 11).

Figure 9: Operational Definition of Teacher Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situative Growth</th>
<th>Cognitive Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both theories of teacher professional learning can arguably be mapped onto The Interconnected Model (Figure 2).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The operational definition of teacher learning for this study is informed by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) where they argue that learning can and should be perceived as both a change in teacher practice (situative) and knowledge (cognitive: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge) where the two theories are interconnected and iterative rather than linear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002)

Figure 10: Continuum of Teacher Learning

| Central Tasks of Learning to Teach on the Continuum of Teacher Learning |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| **Preservice** | **Induction** | **Continuing Professional Development** |
| • Examine beliefs critically in relation to vision of good teaching |
| • Develop subject matter knowledge for teaching |
| • Develop an understanding of |
| • Learn the context – students, curriculum, school community |
| • Design responsive instructional program |
| • Create a classroom learning community |
| • Extend and deepen subject matter knowledge for teaching |
| • Extend and refine repertoire in curriculum, instruction, and assessment |
learners, learning, and issues of diversity
• Develop a beginning repertoire
• Develop the tools and dispositions to study teaching

• Enact a beginning repertoire
• Develop a professional identity
• Strengthen skill and dispositions to study and improve teaching
• Expand responsibilities and develop leadership skills

Source: (Feiman-Nemser, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Taking</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Support and Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, 1998)

In the next section, findings from this study will be outlined with regards to my two research questions, restated below:

1) What do beginning teachers value in an induction program as it contributes to their learning?

2) How do beginning teachers perceive certain induction components as helpful to their learning?

As findings are reported, it will be explicitly noted how categories of findings relate to the definition of teacher learning utilized in this study as well how the study and its finding also embody the continuum of teacher learning. However, as I memoed and analyzed data across cases, I did not code the words from participants according to categories in Feiman-Nemser’s (2012) central tasks of learning to teach or Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s (1998) five features of
adult development. Rather, I used an iterative process of re-reading transcripts and field notes in order to memo about common themes for categories of early career teacher learning, what supports teachers valued, and why certain supports were valued. I developed lists of themes that I believed I had found addressed each of the above category of findings, and then I refined the list as I continued analyzing the words of more participants. This is not to say that I disregarded the theories of Feiman-Nemser and Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, but I did not limit my analysis to pre-organized categories and themes.

**Categories of Early Career Teacher Professional Learning**

There were several common themes that mentors and early career teachers spoke about when asked to consider how new teachers grew or what they believed that they learned. Although the goal of this study was not to directly investigate what early career teachers are believed to learn over the beginning years of teaching, I do believe it is necessary to discuss what participants observed because it offers context for the structures in which growth took place. I also believe that understanding what new teachers are observed as learning better assists in connecting and mapping structures of teacher support onto the ways in which these structures encourage specific learning. I separated out beginning teacher learning into three categories below, but this is not to suggest that these categories exist independent of one another.

**Content and Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

First, mentors and beginning teachers spoke about growth in the area of pedagogical content knowledge. By this, I mean that it was believed that beginning teachers became more proficient in their ability to instruct their content. In general, most teachers felt that they entered
teaching with strong content knowledge from their preservice preparation. What was observed and reflected upon is that beginning teachers grew in their ability to teach the content in ways that they felt was more accessible to students. This was especially true when new teachers were teaching a grade level, subject, or content that they did not major in or had experience as a student teacher.

In the case of Penelope, she student taught English Language Arts in both seventh and eighth grades, and she felt confident in her understanding of the ELA content as well as ELA instruction at those levels. However, she has been teaching sixth grade ELA for the past two years, and she spoke about feeling as though she had to teach herself how to teach ELA to this grade level, especially given that many students were reading below grade level. Penelope also spoke that her greatest area of growth was in what she considered elementary literacy techniques.

In the case of Miriam, she had experience teaching and was certified in biology. However, she was likely going to teach physical science the following year, and this meant that she would need a second certification. Miriam felt very competent in her ability to both understand and instruct within biology, but she spoke about feeling less certain in her ability to teach physical science. Her experience prior to teaching was in a lab, and this contributed to her speaking about how her identity was very much wrapped up in seeing herself as a scientist first and a teacher second. In particular, she saw herself as a biological and environmental scientist rather than a physical scientist, and this likely contributed to her looking forward to needing to learn how to instruct in the physical sciences.
Intra- and Inter-Personal Growth

A second common theme that arose when speaking of new teacher growth is that of personal growth. By this I am referring to two different kinds of personal growth. The first kind of personal growth is intra-personal growth in which teachers grow in their confidence or patience. Both teachers and mentors reported that teachers became more confident in their presence in the classroom as well as making curricular and instructional decisions. A second kind of personal growth reported by teachers and mentors is that of inter-personal growth in which teachers grew in their communication abilities with students, families, and colleagues.

In the case of Megan, she reported that when she began teaching she was fairly confident in her content knowledge and how to lead a classroom. Megan spoke about an instance in which she received feedback that her confidence and demeanor were giving the impression that she was a “know it all” among her colleagues. She describes one piece of feedback she received:

about how I communicate with people within the whole school. Or how I might come off. I like to be efficient and if someone is talking to me and I already know what they’re saying I might say ‘I know I know I know.’ Because I don’t want time to waste time telling me something that I already know. And Claire was just like ‘let them talk people don’t like to be shut down.’ So I can learn how to do that more just listen to people. (Megan)

Megan also spoke about how she observed her own growth in communicating with students. One way she perceived her learning was how she became more deliberate with her language towards children in order to accurately get her point across so that her meaning cannot be misunderstood or misconstrued. Megan also spoke about how learning to be more patient with students contributed to her ability to communicate but also lead class:

I never had very good patience. But I’m told I have very good patience now and it’s kind of like a try to shower the kids with kindness sometimes. And the kids that don’t want to do stuff or whatever and just again using my words and be like ‘well I would really like it if you could take a break and then to come back and be part of the class’. And ‘that’s the expectation and everyone else is doing it.
**Classroom Management**

The intra- and inter-personal learning reported by teachers and mentors among novice teachers is directly related to the third area of growth: classroom management. Teachers who can instruct with a balance of confidence and patience may be able to bridge more easily the multiple roles that teachers must fulfill (e.g., instructor, content specialist, class manager), and this translates to a more seamless ability to manage a larger group of students.

One mentor reported from her experience that sometimes new teachers “are so focused on delivering the lesson and forget about managing the class” (Karen). She continued by saying that:

perhaps when you leave college you feel like you have all that you need to know to be a teacher and then you enter the classroom and all these other things come into play… they [new teachers] don’t know what they don’t know. They are often quick to be ‘ok, ok’ and cover up. And they need to say that ‘I know this’ rather than admitting that they don’t know something. (Karen)

Part of the growth and transformation that Karen has observed in new teachers is that, through experience and reflection, they come to understand what they and their classrooms need, and they learn to trust others around them in helping to provide that.

One factor that two mentors (Karen and Hannah) observed impacting classroom management of beginning teachers was their student teaching experience. In particular, beginning teachers who had completed their student teaching in the fall semester or who had completed a year long student teaching were seen as starting their first year of teaching with stronger classroom management skills. Karen says, “by doing student teaching in the spring you miss out on the set up of the classroom and the set up of the culture of that class.” The timing of
the beginning teacher’s student teaching experience is outside the control of the mentors and school districts, but it provided an understanding of how or in what ways beginning teachers may struggle and be challenged in different ways that mentoring program respond to.

The above observations about teacher learning from participants point towards a range of change in both teacher knowledge as well as teacher practice. While I argue that these changes are evidence of learning, I am aware that these conclusions are generally based on self-reports and the degree of change in teacher knowledge or practice was not corroborated by another measure such as evaluations or researcher observations. However, I do believe that my inclusion of both beginning teacher and mentor perspectives in the study facilitated my participants’ ability to speak about observed changes that they have seen of individuals and across new teachers.

**Structures that are Valued for Novice Teacher Learning**

There have previously been studies that have focused in one way or another about how mentoring impacts new teachers (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Examples include the belief that mentors represented a trusted colleague concerned with a new teacher’s well-being (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O’Brien, 1995); positive impacts of educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Strong & Baron, 2004); and positive retention of teachers (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004; Kelley, 2004). However, there appeared to be fewer studies that focused on support structures other than mentoring that have been shown to support outcome measure such as retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) and job satisfaction (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) on new teacher learning. Ingersoll and Smith’s (2004) analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey indicates-that teachers who experienced such things as having a reduced teaching schedule, teaching within content, and having concurrent preparation periods with
colleagues of a similar content or grade level contributed to higher rates of teacher retention. When beginning this study, my belief was that I could contribute to the literature by investigating how these experiences or support structures other than mentoring could also contribute to early career teacher learning.

What I ultimately found was a finding similar to that of Ingersoll and Strong’s analysis and interpretation (2004), namely, that mentoring is the dominant and most prevalent support structure available to new teachers. I also found that there is enough variation across mentoring programs that studying one program alone is not necessarily able to provide a complete picture of what mentoring has to offer, how programs function, and why it is valued. While my study began from the position of wanting to investigate non-mentoring structures, my work did transition into a case study of mentoring. Having said that, I also believe it is critical to point out that in all my cases, the term mentoring was used as an ‘umbrella’ term for nearly all the services that were provided to new teachers. I believe that this is in part because the mentors in the district were the individuals who were generally directly responsible for planning, facilitating, and implementing the structures for encouraging the growth of beginning teachers. This is not to argue that other individuals in the districts did not contribute to assisting new teachers, but these individuals existed more in a secondary helper role, often helping at the request of the primary teacher helpers (mentors).

The supports that are valued for teacher learning are reported generally according to the frequency with which I observed participants speaking about them. This is not to argue that the first category reported is more valued than the second category because I did not ask participants to rank them. Instead, I reported supports in an order based on how frequently teachers spoke about them and how they appeared to interact with the teachers’ daily lives. My work also
supports a previous finding which is that teachers greatly value interactive support structures (Hawkey, 1997; Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009; Perez, Swain, & Hartsough, 1997). In the following section, I outline three different categories of structures that teachers reported valuing for their learning. Alongside these three categories, I also describe ways in which teachers and mentors perceived structures as being helpful for novice teacher learning.

Support Structure 1: Mentoring

As this study evolved, it became apparent that mentoring was the dominant support structure experienced by the teachers. It is also an important reminder that districts were specifically recruited for participation in the study because of the existence of teacher support program, and these programs turned out to be mentoring programs. Regardless of the required participation in the program, all participants reported valuing the structure of mentoring as well as their mentor teacher. I argue that this support structure was so highly valued because it offered the most direct and most frequent form of interactive help specifically around topics that teachers felt most challenged by in their initial years of teaching.

One reason that teachers appreciated the interaction with mentors was that it offered the time and space for a more veteran teacher to model or demonstrate specific classroom practices, particularly those around classroom management and working with students around non-content based topics. One mentor (Claire) spoke about her work with a new teacher by saying:

in the beginning, the teacher came across as abrupt and she had lots of trouble building a good repertoire with kids. The teacher was getting feedback from her principal about how to build positive relationships with students… I saw her trying to incorporate all the feedback her principal was giving her, but he wasn’t modeling. I went into her classroom and modeled how to build positive relationships with students.
The above example outlined how a mentor had the capacity to be in a teacher’s classroom to assist with a fairly highly visible skill that was identified by the principal, teacher, and mentor as a need for improvement. Teachers also craved a certain amount of assistance with delivering content, and they appreciated being mentored by a person who had a similar content background and expertise. One participant (Miriam) reported that it was beneficial:

having a mentor who taught my subject. That was my first mentor, and she and I were friends. But she taught biology as well. And that was hugely helpful. As a brand-new [teacher] because I had none of my own stuff. We all did exactly the same lab. They were all photocopied over the summer. So you just had to grab the labs and that was really helpful. But it was really helpful to have a mentor who taught my subjects so that when I didn’t know what to do or how to do something, she could help me with that. And that was really good.

In the case of Miriam, she did not speak about her first mentor necessarily modeling or demonstrating specific content practices, but Miriam highly valued her mentor’s availability, willingness, and ability to answer questions around delivering science content. Miriam, Kevin, and Penelope all reported feeling very confident in their teaching content, but they also reported feeling like they needed assistance at times in knowing how to deliver the content to younger students. Mentoring offers a very specific avenue to support beginning teachers in their development of pedagogical content knowledge; that is, knowing how to deliver content to students who may be encountering the subject matter for the first time or struggling to understand something that has become almost second nature to the teacher.

Kevin stated that one reason he so highly appreciated the mentoring program was “It really made me feel a lot less lost.” Here, he was alluding to all of the complex tasks that new teachers must navigate such as teaching content, managing a classroom, fitting in with the culture of the school and colleagues, and communicating with students and families that is sometimes not explicitly understood by or explained to a new staff member. This ‘hidden
curriculum’ of new teacher learning suggests that there is also a bank of skills that new teachers “don’t know that they don’t know”, as one mentor (Karen) described it. Karen continued by talking about how scary it can be to be a new teacher because they are sometimes in a vulnerable position. Having a mentor allows a new teacher the opportunity to “build a relationship with a trusted colleague. Someone that you can put yourself out there to” (Karen).

Across all cases and all participants, it was key that the mentor-mentee relationship was one of both confidentiality and non-evaluation. Claire spoke that her role as a mentor was one of dual hats, both supporting new teachers as classroom instructors as well as supporting their personal development. She described this when she said, “She [her mentee] would come into my office and just cry. She would ask for help. She relied on me emotionally, and she would celebrate her successes with me” (Claire). This relationship of trust served not only to support new teachers in their role in the classroom but also induct them into how to work with a colleague to increase professional knowledge. Karen described her role as a mentor: “Being new to the school, someone you can confide in. Someone that you can go to to have confidential conversations. Professional dialogue and building that relationship for them to trust you.”

Part of building the trust between mentor and mentee was that the mentor did not play a role in the formal evaluation process of the new teacher. This is not to say that mentors did not suggest changes in practice or thinking. Rather, what was key is that the new teacher did not perceive the mentor as judging their abilities or progress because the mentor was seen as taking the journey of learning with the new teacher. This kind of trust was likely built because teachers in this study most often engaged in reflective mentoring which required the mentee to be as much a part of the improvement and goal making process as the more experienced, veteran teacher. Mentors took great care in their communication with principals about new teachers, and
reported generally that they relied on the mentees to share any feedback from their principal. This may have placed a great deal of the responsibility of growth and learning on the new teacher, but it preserved the confidential relationship between the mentor and mentee.

Looking across the cases, teachers had very similar appreciation for the mentoring programs and their mentors regardless of the level to which the program itself was embedded in the overall function of the district. There also did not appear to be differences in the ways in which mentees viewed their mentors contributing to their learning that could be attributed to embeddedness in the district as a result of school or district leadership feeling accountable towards the program. What did appear to be most helpful for new teachers was the flexibility of a mentor to be in the new teacher’s classroom to observe; this was one theme that surfaced multiple times as directly impacting change in teacher practice.

I posit that the structure of the mentoring program in terms of who the mentors are and their responsibilities in the school impacts how valuable the program is perceived by new teachers. Teachers in districts with higher levels of embeddedness in which the mentoring program was prioritized seemed to have greater amounts of access to their mentors. While there were not necessarily differences in how or for what reasons the mentoring program was valued across the cases, mentees did experience a difference in the accessibility of the mentors that could be traced to how embedded the program was in the overall function of the district. It could be the case that districts with higher levels of embeddedness make provisions for ways in which to allow mentors time in their mentee’s classroom. This could be accomplished, for example, by hiring substitutes or another staff member stepping into the mentor’s classroom while they observed their mentee’s classroom. This is not to argue that districts should utilized a full time mentor model, but rather, no matter what model of mentoring program is used, it could be
beneficial for mentors to be released periodically from their own classroom responsibilities in order to be in their mentee’s classroom.

*Support Structure 2: Principals*

Previous research has suggested that principals can have a positive impact on new teachers’ decisions around such things as retention and job satisfaction (Gonzalez & Brown, 2008; Birkeland & Feiman-Nemser, 2012) by assigning teachers to teach within their content and relieve teachers from extra duties like serving on committees. As I was writing the proposal for this study, I wondered if a potential finding would be that principals intentionally create schedules, teaching assignments, or collaborative work times for example. In other words, I thought that participants would speak about how principals developed structures that novices perceived as encouraging their learning. Although I found that the mentoring program of two cases in this study suggested that new teachers not be assigned extra duties (e.g., coaching, committees), participants in the study did not explicitly speak about principals actively developing structures that were intended to support learning. Instead, I believe that what I found is that teachers saw principals *themselves* as structures that they value for their learning.

Although mentors reported their belief that new teachers generally needed support and feedback around classroom management, new teachers reported wanting feedback around content and instructional strategies and ideas. Teachers positioned both mentors and principals as being individuals who had the knowledge and capacity to support their growth around pedagogical content knowledge. One reason that principals were possibly viewed as being able to provide content feedback is that principals across all three cases were in a unique position, being the person who conducts the evaluation process. While mentors most often engaged in
reflective mentoring practices where they did not (in general) provide ‘advice’ or ‘suggestions’ for improvement, teacher participants saw principals as being able to provide more direct feedback for their classroom.

Looking across all the participants, there was a varied range of how and in what ways teachers reported valuing their principals. Initially, this was puzzling because there did not appear to be a pattern of who more highly valued their principal as encouraging their learning based on grade level, content, experience teaching, or by case. There was a trend, however, that teachers had more trust of principals when the program was more embedded in the district. This could be in part because of the degree to which school leadership felt accountability towards the existence of the mentoring program and their involvement in supporting beginning teachers.

One common theme was that teachers appreciated having principals visit and observe their classrooms. Megan comments about her first principal, “This guy was incredible. One of my first times teaching or really being in building he was like ‘you can come to my office for anything.’ [He was] always circulating the building and coming in and saying hi.” However, the assistance that teachers were seeking, particularly from principals, appeared to go beyond teachers just being appreciative when their school leaders visited and observed their classrooms. Ultimately, teachers spoke about wanting to get better in their practice and be held accountable to high expectations. As Carol Dweck (2007) argues about younger children learning, but is still applicable to this analysis, is that high expectations without high support fosters frustration. Looking across the cases and reports of how teachers perceived their principals, there was a sense that teachers began their careers inherently viewing principals as supporting their learning, but this sense lessened for some participants over time.
The participants who reported being the most frustrated with the assistance that they received from their principals was generally around feeling like they were not receiving feedback that was challenging them around content knowledge and instructional practices. Penelope says:

I think that I need someone who teaches English language arts. Who has middle school strategies for teaching English language arts specifically for teaching students who are at the middle school level but who are below grade level. I need someone like that, without to come in and say, ‘Penelope, this is working really well; let’s try guided reading groups. Let’s try this text with your students and do this strategy to build comprehension or do this strategy to increase fluency.’ My principal cannot provide me that feedback. She could tell me how my classroom management looks. She can tell me about participation in my classroom. So things that are kinda, and I don’t mean this to be negative, they’re more superficial. If you have classroom management, and I do, you know, so. And I have those things. Then my principal can only go so far. I’m really working to better my instruction.

Even though Penelope reported having a great repertoire with her mentor, who was also a teaching partner, Penelope looked to the person who was evaluating her to be ‘hard’ on her and suggest changes to her actual teaching practice. Another teacher, Amy, spoke about a time when she felt overwhelmed about her duties:

At one time, it was like when it was March, and it was the worst. It was like when everything was… I knew it was a perfect storm coming and it was just… It was personal things and in other things. A lot of stuff going on at one time. We had a professional development day and I was sitting there and this professional development was not the most beneficial use of my time. And all I could think about was the two meetings I had that week and what wasn’t done, the IEP that wasn’t written, and the one that wasn’t started. And another first year special ed teacher said to me “go talk to your principal. Talk to them”. And I was like “ahhh”. I didn’t want to seem weak. She was like “go ask for a sub. Go talk to her. At least go tell her how you’re feeling”. So I did. And just saying it, just saying it, and verbalizing it was a load off. You know, she was very good. Basically she said, you know, “I can’t really help you, but let’s talk it through. Let’s, first things first. What’s first what’s this? Okay, so that’s done. This you can put off.” I mean, and I was kind of stressing over something that’s a good practice but she said “yeah, it’s a good practice but it’s not a have to have. So put that behind you. And think ‘okay, so if I get the draft in before. And the parents are great.’ So, just talking to all the components with the administrator.
In the case of Amy, she spoke about being very appreciative that her principal made herself available to support her, especially emotionally during an overwhelming time. However, when speaking to Amy, she also appeared flustered and hesitant in her speech and body language, giving the impression that she still felt somewhat alone about completing her special education tasks.

After careful analysis of what was truly at issue with how teachers were viewing their principals, I believe that what I was observing was that teachers see principals as more of a support that is able to directly and positively impact their learning when the teacher and principal share the same view of the principalship. More particular, teachers viewed their principals as encouraging their learning, both changes in cognitive and practical knowledge, when both the principal and the teacher view the role of the principalship as a curriculum and instruction leader. Mentors also spoke about how their interaction with principals was key to supporting beginning teacher learning, more from a programmatic perspective. One mentor (Karen) spoke about their perceptions of how principals understood the role of the mentor and task of mentoring when the principal had also gone through mentoring training:

before you are trained as a mentor you really don’t have an idea as to all that goes into it. There really is all that coaching, dialogue, and talking that is in the training. That’s why I think someone who is not involved in mentoring doesn’t realize. And I think that also it’s great to bring your principles on board. We had change of administration so you see there’s definitely a difference with a principal who went through the training like one of us as mentors as opposed to somebody who came on board later and thinks that she knows what a mentor does.

This idea was echoed by Hannah when she said:

unless they [administrators] really do know what’s going on and really do support it on a regular basis and interface with it, I don’t think you would have that [kind of support]. I
meet with my principals once a month to talk about what’s going on in the program and how it’s benefiting their staff.

At the onset of the study, the goal was not necessarily to collect data on teachers’ perceptions of principals, and this particular finding emerged through analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts. My analysis also suggests that the view of principals as a curriculum and instruction leader, one that is generally desired by teachers, could be juxtaposed to principals as ‘supervisors’ or ‘building managers.’ The intention here is not to make the case that principals ought to assume the role as a curriculum and instruction leader. Rather, I argue that teachers value principals as contributing to their learning at higher degrees when both the new teacher and the principal share this perception of the principalship.

Structure 3. Network of Colleagues

Of the three categories of supports that novice teachers report valuing for their learning, the aforementioned ones (mentoring/mentors and principals) generally involve a person in a position of expertise or more experience assisting the novice teacher. My findings further suggest that having a network of colleagues is critical in terms of the supports that new teachers value for their learning. The networks that participants spoke of were online networking; peer partners and fellow department members; and workshops.

One teacher, Megan, expressed some frustration that she felt she was not being held accountable for tasks that she was asked to do for her professional development and learning. Namely:
I felt like we were supposed to be accountable for all these things because we were told to do this. And then there’s no follow-through. And no one cares. We were asked to have a portfolio website and I have all these things, but no one checked it. (Megan)

In response to this frustration, she began networking with other teachers through online sources where she was able to share her work around curriculum and developing new units for her class. For this teacher in particular, what she learned from her online networking with other teachers was less important than the sense she felt that someone cared about what she was doing. Megan says:

I use twitter a lot and that’s really my motivation on a daily basis. Which is just connecting with other teachers around the world and reading what they’re doing. I think to myself ‘Well, I want to do something like that.’ So that’s kind of like where the [recognition] comes from. Me putting on something online; that’s my recognition.

In a way, the online connection that this participant felt was similar to that of having a professional learning community. At the time of data collection, Megan was attempting to begin a PLC for her content:

I’ve never met the high school teachers. I’ve never met them. And [I was] always trying to. Let’s put all the pieces together, you know, curriculum development. And really K-8 we always meet. But it’s like what am I preparing my students for? I don’t know. So I recently reached out to them and was like, ‘hey, can we meet?’ It’s good for professional development. And they were like ‘oh yeah. That’s a good idea.’

The fundamental message that this participant was sharing was that she perceived teachers of a similar content as being rich resources for her own thinking and learning, particularly around classroom practices. She saw teachers of her own content as being able to enrich her understanding of teaching around such notions as curriculum development and alignment in a way that she did not speak of her mentor or principal necessarily being able to. In
no way did this suggest that she devalued the support or expertise that she spoke about her mentor having. Rather, there was a sense that teachers viewed teachers who taught a similar content as being like-minded and going through the same thought process.

A second type of network among colleagues that teachers felt contributed to their learning was that of fellow department members. In these instances, the networking was more informal and unstructured, and often the support developed because of convenience of proximity to one another. Miriam recounts:

We were on top of each other [during construction]. But I got to observe people. I got to talk to people. I got to see what people were doing. And we got to share, we got to share things together. So on the third floor here we have the fire doors in the classrooms as well. So those are open most of the time. During classes will shut them because some of my classes get loud. Most of the time at the end of the day we open and we just talk.

Similar to Megan, Miriam spoke about how her interaction with fellow science teachers sitting together at lunch and having classrooms next to one another, supported her growth particularly in curriculum and instructional practices around her content. Looking across these more informal times of teacher collaboration, they are appreciated by teachers because they provided the time and the space for conversations about class, particularly around immediate issues that teachers felt they were facing that day or that week. Teachers spoke about time with their fellow teachers as being as providing ideas about content and instruction but most importantly, for processing the events of the day. Ultimately, this kind of collegiality was valued for its ability to help teachers feel as though they were not alone.

A final type of network that teachers spoke about valuing for their learning and growth occurred during the ‘workshop’ or after school mentee meeting times. Each of the three cases in this study offered (and generally requested attendance at) workshops for beginning teachers that
either occurred during the school day or after school dismissal. This type of support was a slightly more formal kind of networking than the two previously described for two reasons. First, the support was structured and facilitated, and, even further so, it was structured and facilitated by mentors. In other words, this type of colleague networking was not spontaneous or came about because of ‘convenience’ of proximity or timing. There was often a goal or objective for the time together with specific planned activities, norms for interaction, and pre-created materials. Second, the workshops were focused on providing a service for and among teachers in a similar position: either individuals new to teaching or new to the district. In this way, the networking was distinct from other times of the day because the group of teachers attending was likely bringing similar concerns and daily experiences to the group.

Teachers generally valued these mentee workshop times for their ability to promote collaboration. Kevin reported that he “connected with several teachers that I talk to just at the mentee meetings. They [the mentee meetings] really helped me get engulfed in the society.” Another particular kind of collaboration that beginning teachers were seeking was that of comradery. They needed to feel a sense that others were feeling the same tensions, turmoils, and daily ups – and – downs. Said by Megan:

- It’s not like I learned a bunch at these meetings, but it’s nice to have that community of people… And just kind of hearing that other people are having problems in their own realm regardless if they’re librarian or a math teacher. Just knowing that not everyone is doing perfectly.

This was important in building up the confidence that they were not alone or somehow the odd person out. In Amy’s case, she was one of three new special education teachers in her building, and they met nearly every month just among themselves. Their time together gave Amy a sense
of confidence in being able to think through all the tasks that she needed to do to support students and families and not worrying that she had missed something or was getting a different message from other special education teachers about what needed to be done.

Part of the reason that the mentee meetings were valued so highly for their collaborative capability could be because two of the mentors who helped plan and then facilitate the workshops perceived the teachers’ time together as being a time for colleague interaction and collaboration. One mentor, Hannah, spoke about how she intentionally planned the monthly meetings to allow for plenty of collaborative time among beginning teachers:

For years they would have monthly meetings, and [we] would do meeting topics. And we had years of data consistently saying the same thing: There’s just too much going on first of all. But there were a lot of feelings like we were meeting for meeting sake. Don’t do that unless we’ve got a really good purpose. And so what we did is we took away the monthly meetings this year, and instead there’s only three meetings. There’s one of the beginning of the year that’s more logistical like answering questions and it’s that whole piece of getting together. I think we spent more than half of the meeting sharing success and challenges. It was a collaborative piece which seems really high. And then it was like “okay this is what to expect the next couple of weeks”. And then we meet like the middle of the year. “How’s it going? Sharing success and challenges.” Here’s what to expect for the next couple of months and saying the same thing. I have data, those have scored well because you’ve allowed me to get together and talk about myself and talk about what’s going on with me and get feedback from my peers and listen to them say and allow them to collaborate… So I think the meetings shifted from a topic to a time to collaborate and that that was really useful.

Another mentor, Karen, spoke about her district’s end of the year mentee survey in which they found that mentees did not value the monthly meetings as highly as the mentors may have expected. When asked what may change for the next school year she said that there will likely be fewer meetings throughout the school year and the topics for each meeting will be less structured, allowing for teachers to interact more consistently.
This response by the mentors to the data that their mentees provided aligns fairly accurately with my conversations with teachers around what structures they value for their learning. The mentee workshop and meeting times seemed to allow teachers a structured time to be able to process their thinking aloud with others who were having similar experiences, and this seemed to be key given that they often felt overwhelmed by all their tasks of teaching and being acclimated into their communities. In a way, the mentee meetings were a time where teachers felt as though they had ‘permission’ to think about themselves and their teaching. Even though teachers reported appreciating the reflective mentoring meetings with their mentors, collaboration time with other beginning teachers appeared to have a cathartic impact.

**Mapping Categories of Professional Learning onto Support Structures**

The table below brings together ideas around the two research questions. Figure 12 maps the four categories of professional learning (classroom management; inter-personal learning; intra-personal learning; and pedagogical content knowledge) onto the three support structures (mentors/mentoring; principals; and networks of colleagues). Categories of learning and growth listed underneath the three support structures are those (learning categories) which participants attributed to specific supports.

There emerged a series of trends about the ways in which participants valued certain support structures for their ability to encourage specific domains or categories of professional learning. There is some repetition across the categories, where some categories of professional learning are perceived to be encouraged by multiple supports. For example, mentees reported that their confidence in instruction and classroom presence was encouraged by mentors or networks of colleagues. Interpretation of these trends will be offered in the following sections.
Figure 12: Mapping Professional Learning onto Support Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentors/Mentoring</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management (class routines)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-personal Skills (confidence and presence in the classroom)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intra-personal Skills (confidence and presence in the classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-personal Skills (relationships with families, colleagues, and students)</td>
<td>Content Knowledge (curriculum ideas)</td>
<td>Content Knowledge (curriculum ideas)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Instructional Strategies)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Limitations of Supports

The previous section discussed three support structures that beginning teachers viewed as encouraging their learning as well as the conditions under which they believe their learning was either optimized or negatively impacted. However, within supports that teachers saw as helpful to their learning, there were also some programmatic or structural limitations that must be given attention to in order to fully understand how mentoring programs are able to encourage teacher learning and function within a school district. This next section will present limitations to two of the support structures presented as a means, in part, to outline realistic expectations about and for these structures.

Limitations of Reflective Mentoring

Each of the districts in this study trained their mentors to utilize a reflective mentoring model in their program’s work with new teachers (both teachers new to the profession or new to
the district). As described by both the mentor and mentees, there were several key, fundamental ideas of reflective mentoring. First, mentors assumed a non-evaluative role. This meant that mentors were not part of the formal evaluation process, but it also meant that the focus of mentee classroom observations was on data collecting in order to present to the new teacher. Mentors were not making judgments about classroom practices and pay careful attention to language when speaking about observations. Second, mentors were trained and practiced providing their mentees a series of questions that were meant to encourage self-reflection (on the part of the new teacher). The goal here was to engage and guide the mentee in reflection of the classroom and bring the new teacher into professional goal setting.

Teachers spoke very highly about their respective mentoring programs and about their mentors. There was a high degree of trust in their mentors and respect for their mentor’s capabilities. At times, however, there was a certain amount of frustration on the part of the mentee because of the reflective structure of the mentoring program. Penelope says:

She’s [her mentor] a rock. You can tell her anything. And she’ll be honest with you. And that’s really what I need. Unfortunately the mentor program is not evaluative. And sometimes I just want her to say, “Penelope, you’re doing this this and this really well. Here is what you need to work on, and here is how you’re going to improve on it”. But she is not like that. And the mentoring program here isn’t like that. It’s reflective. So, she often has to ask me questions, and then I have to reflect my practice. And it forces me to reflect on what I’m doing. But sometimes I find that I still don’t know what I’m doing and I don’t have the answer. Sometimes they still don’t know if I… I often know what I’m doing wrong. Well, not wrong. But what I need to improve on. I don’t always know how to improve it

Likely the frustration expressed by this teacher came from her ultimate goal of wanting to improve her teaching practice, a sentiment that was shared across all the teacher participants. Teachers wanted to improve and be held to high standards, but they also wanted to feel like the work that they were doing to change their practice was intentional and going to lead to stronger
teaching abilities. By this it is meant that teachers craved a certain amount of direction about how to accomplish changes in their practice or thinking. This desire for a more well defined path about how to improve aspects of their teaching may come from the ability to see improvement in shorter, measureable, or observable benchmarks.

Teachers spoke repeatedly about feedback and receiving feedback about their classroom as one giant lever for changing classroom practice. In short, it appeared that teachers wanted and needed help in diagnosing what was happening in their classrooms and ways to think about their students’ learning. While teachers generally appreciated the reflective mentoring conversations, these too appeared to be necessary but not sufficient towards addressing specific areas of teacher learning. Teachers reported to a much lesser degree than mentors the use of the evaluation rubric, the Danielson Framework, in their conversations with mentors, and instead, mentees spoke about “strategies” or “teaching techniques” as being helpful components of conversations with their mentors. This is not to say that progress on a Danielson rubric was not spoken about in conversation, but perhaps new teachers were not aware that their conversations with mentors were related more directly to the evaluation rubric than they thought. It could be that new teachers were perceiving conversations differently than their mentors. Either way, new teachers did not always perceive their reflective mentoring conversations as directly relating to progress around teaching practices.

Thinking across how reflective mentoring was reported as being valued, there are three possible reasons that I would like to forward that reflective mentoring was perhaps viewed as limiting. First, it may be the case that reflective mentoring contributes to the longer term development of a teacher that is not immediately visible because the goal is to teach habits of mind about how to analyze one’s practice, ask questions of others, and develop positive and
inquiry based relationships with colleagues. A potential juxtaposition to reflective mentoring is that of more direct instructional coaching model in which a more experienced ‘other’ (e.g., a mentor teacher) provides a goal for a beginning teacher, (often) observes class to collect information, and then shares an opinion about how well the new teacher mastered the instructional goal. An instructional coaching model could provide the structure that new teachers seek about to receive feedback as well as mastery around feedback, but a critical question to consider is whether or not this model develops the habits of mind around reflecting on practice and habits of inquiry. If a teacher becomes reliant upon a mentor always to provide the path for improvement, at what point is the new teacher able to assume a role of thinking about their own teaching? Also, does a reflective mentoring model contribute to the notion of teaching as a profession and cultivating a long term mentality (ie, teacher retention) among its new members?

A second possible reason that reflective mentoring may be limited in its ability to provide the learning experiences sought by new teachers could be how the mentors are positioned in the program and in the district. Generally, the type of mentoring that has the highest potential for teacher growth and learning is that of educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2012), and this often positions the mentor as being a ‘teacher educator’: a knowledgeable expert with the skills to guide the learning of the novice teacher. It may be the case that the implementation of reflective mentoring programs does not necessarily position mentors as teacher educators, and what this possibly does is to impact the way that mentors see themselves; the way that teachers view mentors; and the way that mentors and mentees interact with one another.

One lingering question is under what conditions does reflective mentoring support a notion of mentors as teacher educators? This inquiry leads to a possible third reason that reflective mentoring may have limitations. Across all of the cases, the mentor program was
viewed as ‘non-evaluative’, meaning that mentors were not part of the formal evaluation process. A non-evaluative approach was also generally understood to mean that mentors did not interpret the events of a class or teaching experiences for their mentees. Mentors were trained to not pass judgment about classes but rather to provide mentees with data. It could be that part of this interpretation of reflective mentoring came from the guideline that members within the same bargaining unit in a union could not evaluate one another. Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) argue that assessment cannot be absent from assistance when speaking of the learning of beginning teachers, and that we should review the way we perceive assessment and evaluation. This could include refining our understanding of evaluation into two separate categories: 1) Evaluation (capital E) as the formal process undertaken by one’s principal where a person is rated against some set of established standards; and 2) evaluation (lower case e) as the weekly feedback between mentor and mentee around goals set by the learning pair.

The limitations outlined above are not to argue that reflective mentoring is not an effective support structure for encouraging the learning of beginning teachers. Rather, these themes of limitations that arose from the reports of participants serve to remind that any support structure that any support structure comes with its own series of considerations, pros and cons, and gives and takes.

**Limitations of Workshops**

While teachers appreciated workshop time with fellow novice teachers, there were features of this support that impacted it to be fully appreciated for its potential to encourage teacher growth. The first feature was the timing of workshops during the day. Mentors and district leaders were very cognizant of overburdening beginning teachers by requiring them to attend
workshops after school, a time that many teachers use for meeting with mentors, grading, and lesson planning. The cases in this study used a combination of meetings for their beginning teachers after school as well as during the day. Miriam talks about what she likes about the professional development workshops:

Having the meetings outside of school day, I liked that. Because I do like the professional development here, but I don’t like not being… I don’t like missing entire days. I know how much making sub plans is a pain for me, and [now] I have things available that I can just photocopy. But as a brand-new new teacher, writing sub plans is not easy. It’s not something that you already have written out. It’s not something you have available to just photocopy. I don’t think meeting two hours a month is excessive. And having a class like that [was good]. But having a class in the afternoon where you don’t have to make sub plans and figure out what’s going on and try to figure out the scheduling and stuff like that. That was ideal.

Allowing teachers the time to gather gives them the opportunity to reflect upon their practice in a sheltered manner, but as amplified by the words of Robyn, taking teachers out of their classrooms caused a level of extra stress. This may have impacted their ability to fully mentally and emotionally participate in the workshop.

A second limitation of workshops’ ability to assist teacher growth is the timing of certain professional development topics throughout the course of the year. Mentors spoke about scheduling certain topics such as classroom management at the beginning of the year in order to give teachers reminders about best practices. This often took precedence over other topics such as how to use online gradebook and school emergency procedures that teachers reported needing for practical purposes of their job. In an effort not to over-schedule workshops or overwhelm teachers at the beginning of the year, mentors spoke about needing to make compromises in order to optimize teacher learning around classroom practices with practical teaching responsibilities.
While it could be argued that the structure of monthly workshops, agendas, or schedules was less than ideal for beginning teachers in districts, it is also worth considering that the mentoring programs in two of the districts in this study were nearly completely responsible for on-boarding new members to the profession and to the district. The mentoring programs of Bakerston and Garfield School Districts held New Teacher Orientations prior to the start of the school year where basic employment information and functions of the school district were outlined and explained by either the district mentor or a member of an administration team (i.e., assistant superintendent, head of human resources). Clarkeville School District no longer offered a New Teacher Orientation day(s) which meant that the team of mentors took on the responsibility of incorporating this information into the workshops. This often meant that other professional development topics were moved or omitted, as it was determined more necessary to acclimate new teachers to the district. This is not to be critical of the mentoring program but to suggest that perhaps that mentoring programs, at times, take on responsibilities that could be supported by others in the district as well.
CHAPTER 5. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTORING PROGRAMS

Considerations

The goal of this study was to investigate support structures that beginning teachers value and in what ways these structures are valued for their learning as a means to extend the findings for other districts and possibly inform the thinking around other induction or mentoring programs. While analyzing the data across districts, there appeared to be two important considerations that are at play and impact the implementation of the mentoring programs: the structure of the mentoring programs and the culture of assistance and growth among colleagues.

Structure of Mentoring Program

This study included participants who utilized three different structures for the mentoring programs: 1) a full-time mentor model; 2) a full time teachers-as-mentor model; and 3) a combination model (with a full time mentors and full time classroom teachers serving as mentors). Each case had chosen a model of mentoring that functioned within the priorities of the larger district, and the choices came with a series of considerations that needed to pay attention to the complex nature of schools and learning. In other words, there is likely not a ‘one size fits all’ mentoring program that is able to meet the needs and realities of all districts, and these considerations are outlined below.

Financial. The cases in this study dedicated various amounts of financial support to its respective mentoring program. For districts that utilized full time personnel specific to the mentoring program, this included dedicating resources for a full time salary and benefits. For
districts that utilized full time classroom teachers as mentors, the district provided a stipend to each mentor to compensate for their additional responsibilities. The very nature of the full time (versus part time) mentor model means that the program required more district financial resources. In the two districts that had full time mentors, this cost was embraced because the program and its ability to contribute to the priorities of the school district (e.g., teacher retention, effective classroom teachers).

As was the situation with one of the full time mentor model cases, the finances of the district changed, and this positioned the mentoring program as possibly no longer sustaining other functions in the district because it required such a high amount of resources. This is not to suggest that mentoring was no longer valued in this case but that the cost of the program could no longer be justified because the financial resources were stretched and needed in so many places. In this case, the financial change in the district meant that a mentoring program was no longer able to be supported, because as the funding shifted, the mentoring program was not able to shift with it.

It may be the case that having a flexible program structure that allows for financial or other priority shifts could be beneficial for the sustainability of the program. For example, if a district uses a full time mentor model and the financial resources decrease such that there is not enough money to continue the program in its current state, it could place the district in the position of having to cut the program in its entirety. This could be juxtaposed to a district that uses full time classroom teachers as mentors where the resources required to run the program are considerably less. A decrease in resources in a district with this model could mean one of multiple outcomes: a decrease in the number of mentors, a decrease in the amount of the stipend, or removing stipends and cutting the program. It is less likely, though not impossible, that a
district will cut a classroom teaching position than a full time mentor position, meaning that a person who is a full time classroom teacher and part time mentor would still be employed. This is important to a district because it has implications for teachers who are tenured.

The major difference from a financial perspective between a full time and part time mentor model is the flexibility that is allowed for the program to continue by utilizing part time mentors should changes in finances or priorities occur within the district. It also may be the case that utilizing a part time mentor model, which generally costs less, poses less of a financial ‘threat’ to other programs in the district both in reality and perception. What is likely key for districts to consider when beginning or changing their mentoring programs is the expected longevity of funding for the program as well as ways in which the program can shift with district priorities.

Part Time versus Full Time Mentoring Model. Across all cases, regardless of the model of mentoring that was used, teachers had great appreciation and respect for their mentors. One frustration about the nature of mentoring, however, expressed both by mentors and mentees was the mentor’s ability to observe their mentee’s classroom. Utilizing a full time model for the mentoring program allowed mentors the flexibility to frequently visit and observe their mentee, a feature of mentoring programs that mentees found particularly helpful for both their learning around classroom practices as well as developing their confidence leading a class. Regardless of how highly talking about and reflecting on practices was for beginning teachers, it was widely agreed upon that there was no substitute for a mentor being able to spend time in their mentee’s classroom. These classroom visits provided a common ground from which both the mentor and mentee could think, talk, and understand teaching and learning.
Full time classroom teachers who also served as mentors spoke about how it was difficult at times to be able to visit their mentee’s classrooms, and they believed that this impacted their ability to offer assistance in several ways. First, if a mentor was able to visit their mentee’s classroom, it was often for a short amount of time that generally coincided with the mentor’s lunch, recess, or plan period. What this meant for mentors is that they were placed in a position of choosing to attend to their own classroom (e.g. grading, planning, tutoring) or observing their mentee teach. There was the possibility of hiring a substitute teacher while the mentor observed the mentee, but this brought about a second difficulty. Namely, removing an experienced, highly qualified (mentor) teacher from his or her classroom could impact student learning because a substitute teacher who is less familiar with the mentor teacher’s classroom and students would be teaching for a period of time.

The situation that hiring substitute teachers to fill in in a classroom while a mentor teacher observed their mentee placed a school and district in a philosophical conundrum of having to prioritize teacher learning over student learning, even for a short amount of time. A mentor from one district reported that several principals would ‘cover’ classes for mentor teachers in order for them to visit their mentee’s classroom. In this situation, the principal was another adult in the building who knew the students and was highly capable of providing continuity of instruction and class or school expectations. This could possibly mean that the absence of the regular classroom teacher had a lesser impact on the students in the mentor’s classroom than hiring a substitute teacher. Generally, it appeared as though districts that had a deeply embedded mentoring program were willing to prioritize teacher learning, even briefly, because there seemed to be a shared belief among teachers and school and district administration
in the long term benefits of attending to the learning of novice teachers, particularly in their beginning years.

While it may be the case that having a mentor who also serves as a full time teacher can impact the accessibility to and learning on the mentee, it could also be that the mentor’s classroom benefits from having a teacher who is focused on supporting the learning of a colleague. Mentor teachers are taught how to collect classroom data, analyze classrooms, and refine teaching practices, particularly for their mentee’s classes. However, this set of thinking and analyzing skills can transfer to the mentor’s classroom, allowing them to look at their own practice through a lens of improvement. Another possible advantage of having full time teachers serve as mentors is that they can remain current with the challenges of the classroom and teaching, such as new teaching initiatives or changes in assessments.

**Culture of Assistance and Growth Among Colleagues**

A second consideration impacting the implementation and operation of mentoring programs is that of the culture of assistance or growth among colleagues. By this it is meant the ways in which colleagues of new teachers (e.g., other teachers, school staff members) understand and accept the transition period of learning the systems and routines of the school and assuming the responsibilities of the classroom. There is evidence that colleagues can become frustrated at times towards new teachers. As reported by Claire:

Sometimes people in the district will make comments to ma about being annoyed that a new teacher doesn’t know something like how to turn in grades or use some certain technology. Sometimes working with new teachers means that we have to educate those around the new teacher; we have to remember what the new teacher knows and don’t know.
How tolerant a school staff or district is towards the ways in which novice teachers are still acclimating to their new responsibilities and environments can impact the teacher’s help seeking behaviors. For example, Megan recounts her first year of teaching:

I’d be in staff meetings and raise my hand and I’d ask a question… like ‘why don’t we have a Bell System?’ The other teachers just don’t even care. I was told… I just need to nod my head and say yes more. So I’ve learned to care less. And I’ve learned to just do my own thing and not worry about everything else. But that was just an example of something that I’ve asked and then I just kind of stopped asking.

Looking across the cases in this study, it seemed as though districts where full time teachers also served as mentors may increase the culture of help among colleagues because a significant number of staff members are involved in the mentoring program, so help seeking was normalized. One way in which the mentoring program became embedded in the function of the district appeared to be how accepted the purpose of the program was, namely the assistance of beginning teachers as well as those new to the district. Looking at Sarah’s example of her experience with asking questions particularly in a larger staff setting, it may be that one role of the principal is to set the tone within a school that a culture of assistance is normal. However, also having the presence of multiple people on staff who are actively engaged in the sustained and structured assistance of new teachers was key.

Conceptual Implications

This study was guided by three theories that together provided a lens for conceptualizing what, where, when, and under what conditions teacher learning occurs. These theories included Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) definition of teacher learning; Feiman-Nemser’s (2012) conceptual framework of a continuum of teacher learning; and Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s
(1998) adult development theory. Taken together, these three theories support the idea that teachers’ habits of practice and mind can continue to change and develop under certain conditions. The goal, then, of this study was to further investigate support structures and their surrounding contexts within the beginning years of teaching that were perceived to contribute to changes in teacher practice or knowledge about teaching.

Throughout the analysis of data, explicit attention was paid towards not organizing and then reporting findings through the lens of the theories in the study’s framework. As Dr. Schram explained, this can sometimes act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for one’s data. Therefore, this section will in part serve to outline possible intersections between findings and the theoretical framework as well as discuss the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge around early career teacher learning.

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) posit that learning can be understood both as a change in practice (situative) as well as a change in knowledge (cognitive). There is evidence from this study’s data that suggests that beginning teachers underwent situative and cognitive changes in their teaching. In terms of situative changes, mentors and teachers noted changes to novice’s practice around classroom management as evidenced in Figure 13 below. Classroom management could be thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses multiple components, and the findings from this study support three specific perceived changes to teacher’s habits of classroom behavior. These include: increased amounts of confidence around their role as the lead teacher; the ability to more effectively communicate and build positive relationships with students and families; and the ability to set boundaries and expectations around student behavior in class.
During interviews, teacher participants who were earlier in their careers than others in the study spoke more frequently about changes to classroom practice, although nearly all teachers and mentors reported classroom management as an area of intense growth for beginning teachers. Teachers also spoke about changes in content, pedagogical, or pedagogical content knowledge as reported in Figure 14 below about perspectives of cognitive growth. In general, teachers felt confident about their content knowledge, but they were less sure about pedagogical content knowledge, the ability to use content specific or age appropriate mechanisms to instruct students. Because of this perceived gap, teachers were more likely to want to focus on their instruction, whereas mentors perceived beginning teachers needing to attend to both issues of classroom management and content.
This is not to argue that teachers perceived their growth within the cognitive realm and mentors perceived novice teacher growth within the situative realm. As Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) point out, teacher learning across these two domains is related and iterative, so it is unlikely to be able to completely disentangle our understanding of one from the other as both practitioners or researchers. What I do believe to be the case through analysis of data is that when asked to speak about how they have grown or what they have learned, beginning teachers had a tendency to speak first and primarily of cognitive changes and secondarily, of situative changes. This was in contrast to most mentors’ perspectives when asked about beginning teacher growth where they would report primarily changes to classroom management (situative) and secondarily cognitive changes.

The three cases in this study were recruited for participation because they had an established teacher support program; namely, a mentoring program. The districts offered these
programs in response to a need of some kind (e.g. teacher retention, effective teaching, teacher learning) and a belief that mentoring beginning teachers would address and be a solution for that need. This is to argue that each of the three districts shared the belief to some degree that 1) there is a transition period or period of learning at the beginning of teaching or moving into a new district; and 2) a mentoring program can assist teachers as they transitioned into the profession or district. What this means is that the districts in my study had a somewhat predisposed mindset towards teacher growth being something that needs attending to in the early years, and therefore, this acted as a reflection of a belief in continued teacher learning.

Due to the structure of my study and its participants, I believe that I must be cautious in asserting further evidence for Feiman-Nemser’s (2012) theory of a continuum of teacher learning and its central tasks of teaching based on my findings. It could be the case that I found evidence of continued teacher learning because my investigation took place in districts and schools that held an assumption that early career teachers are still learning about the profession and need assistance doing so. However, the three districts are situated in a state that does not mandate beginning teacher support, and this suggests that at some point the districts made the explicit decision with a clear purpose to begin programs to assist teachers. In other words, there was a reason that individuals in each of the three districts found value in offering beginning teacher support. The reason that these three mentoring programs began in the first place could stand as evidence that new members to the profession of teaching are changing and being changed by their new environment.

What was key about the way in which Feiman-Nemser’s continuum of teacher learning intersected with findings from this study is that teachers and mentors clearly believed that changes were occurring that were specifically deepening professional practice and knowledge.
Feiman-Nemser outlines different central tasks of learning to teach across four different stages (of learning to teach), and although, the focus on this study was around what Feiman-Nemser calls the ‘induction’ phase, teacher participants appeared to be at many different points along the continuum. Analysis of findings from this study suggest a categorical overlap with two of Feiman-Nemser’s tasks:

1. Learn the context – students, curriculum, school community;
2. Create a classroom learning community

Looking across the analysis of findings and the ways in which these findings interact with the theories of Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) and Feiman-Nemser (2012), I posit that two premises can be confirmed in order to move forward with addressing the research aims of the study. First, teachers underwent a series of changes in their beginning years in the classroom that align with Clarke and Hollingsworth’s definition of learning. Second, findings of teacher learning from this study align with two central tasks of learning to teach as conceptualized by Feiman-Nemser (2012). The primary goals of this study were to investigate what structures and in what ways these structures are valued for the learning of novice teachers. My findings suggest that there are three structures teachers and mentors value for beginning teacher learning (mentors, principals, and collegial networks), and the ways in which these structures are valued interact and align with Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s (1998) conditions for adult development.

Findings from this study were not analyzed or coded using Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall’s conditions. Rather, the assertion that teachers and mentors participating in this study found certain conditions valuable for learning came forth through an iterative process of reading
transcripts from interviews and memoing about emergent themes. This process yielded, in particular, three conditions put forth by Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall that participants also reported finding valuable for creating contexts for learning: reflection, support and challenge, and continuity. Focusing on the reports from teacher participants in this study, it appears as though the support structures of mentors and principals were valued for different reasons. Mentors were viewed as being able to provide conditions for reflection, while both mentors and principals were seen as being structures that provided support and challenge.

It may be the case that the capability of mentors and principals to provide different conditions (as outlined by Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall) was due to the nature of the program or the configuration of personnel in the school. For example, beginning teachers met with their mentors weekly to engage in reflective mentoring practices about their teaching, but teachers did not report meeting on a frequent or recurring basis with principals. This meeting structure allows the opportunity for teachers to engage in reflection with mentors more regularly than with principals. The role of the principal to provide evaluative feedback to teachers was viewed as offering the element of ‘challenge’, a stretch or next steps to improvement in their classrooms. Many teachers also reported feeling supported in their endeavor to implement challenges put forth by principals, particularly when principals completed a second observation cycle that referenced previous feedback or when mentors would incorporate data collection and reflection opportunities for teachers during meetings (with mentors) that focused on elements of the principal’s evaluation and suggestions.

The notion of having a singular learning focus for teachers speaks in part to the condition of continuity. Teachers did not explicitly speak about valuing a single focus for change in their practice or knowledge. Instead, multiple teachers did speak about appreciating the opportunity
to discuss their evaluations (from principals) with their mentors who would then, in turn, be able to support the teacher to incorporate suggestions. Teachers also reported finding it useful when their mentor would conduct an observation cycle that was focused on previous principal suggestions immediately prior to the teacher’s next evaluation observation and conference.

Participation in a mentoring program provided for novice teachers an explicit opportunity, time, and space to reflect on one’s practice. This specific context in which beginning teachers felt like the focus was on them contributed to changes in practice and changes in knowledge about teaching.

*Contributions to the Body of Knowledge*

The findings from this study align with those from previous literature. As has been corroborated by other literature, mentoring is a valued structure for and by both mentors and mentees (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Fry, 2007) including retention of new members in the profession (Strong and Ingersoll, 2011), job satisfaction (Moore Johnson and Birkeland, 2003), and increase in confidence around classroom presence and interactions with students and families (Devos, 2010). Hobson, et al (2009) argues that further research needs to be done investigating the relationship between mentoring and actual changes to classroom practices. However, the findings from this study join those of previous works in concluding that mentors and mentees perceive changes to classroom practices such as those around management of student behavior (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2001; Hudson, 2012).

In addition, I concluded that the context of mentoring is important, including the kind and type of mentoring in which beginning teachers are engaged (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). This study investigated mentoring in districts where *reflective mentoring* was
taught to mentors and used in interactions with mentees. This idea closely aligns to other models of mentoring such as transformational mentoring (Cochran-Smith and Paris, 1995) and educative mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2012) where emphasis is placed on new teachers building and creating their own understanding of the classroom and students through analysis and reflection under the guidance of a knowledgeable other. Richter and his colleagues (2013) argue that this follows a constructivist-oriented approach to mentoring.

Findings from this study also extend those from previous works. Several studies concluded that one disadvantage of having full time teachers also serve as mentors is that this can cause mentors to become overburdened by taking on additional responsibilities (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). The feeling of additional mentoring responsibilities was reported as being an outcome of having less time to spend on their own classroom, not always being available to their mentees, and feeling overwhelmed by the task of assisting a colleague in learning to teach. Mentors from one district in this study spoke about feeling that they did not always have the time that they would liked to dedicate to their mentee often because they were unable to observe classes frequently and meetings with mentees generally took place during lunch breaks. While mentors did report some increased stress around feeling responsible for the performance of their mentee, this was less reflected in this study than in other literature. This may be because all of the mentoring programs in this study utilized multi-faceted levels of support meaning that beginning teachers may have been assigned a single mentor, but novices interacted with other veteran colleagues within the context of assistance (e.g., peer mentors, after school meetings with all mentors and mentees). This could possibly be meant to not overburden mentors as well as spread out the responsibilities of support of new teachers, not relying completely on one individual.
Hobson, et al (2009) argues that there are several contextual conditions that are helpful for cultivating successful mentoring programs such as having mentors who are compensated as well as being part of a learning culture. The principal has often been viewed as the individual who is capable of creating a culture of learning (Youngs, 2007; Ganser, 2001). Findings from this study suggest that one way districts have created the conditions of learning environments is to have mentors who are also full time teachers. This learning environment likely goes hand in hand and develops iteratively as the mentoring program becomes more embedded in the workings of the school and the district. In other words, it may be the case that having full time teachers also serve as mentors can begin creating acceptance among other staff members around the needs of beginning teachers, and this, in turn, serves to embed the mentoring program in the function of the school district.

As the leader of a school principals are also in a position to encourage the learning culture of a school. This study joins previous research (Ganser, 2002; Young, 2007) that asserts that principals are an important component of new teacher learning. Youngs (2007) found that principals who encouraged the learning of new teachers did so by creating the time and space for mentees to meet with their mentors. Explicit attention to scheduling meetings between the mentee-mentor pair as well as ensuring that these meetings were continuously prioritized was found to characterize principals and their schools who focused on the instructional improvement of beginning teachers (Youngs, 2007).

This study extends the body of literature in two ways. First, beginning teachers were looking not only to their mentor to substantive content feedback and advice but also their principal. Second, teachers viewed their principals as more helpful and able to positive influence their learning when the principal shared a perspective of the principalship as being a position of a
The finding of the perspective of the principalship was concluded through analysis of the data but not explicitly inquired about during interviews, and so I agree with Langdon’s (Langdon, Alexander, Ryde, & Baggetta, 2014) assertion that more work needs to be done in helping school leaders understand their role in creating learning opportunities for beginning teachers.

Practical Implications Overview

As a means to discuss the practical implications that this study presents, it is useful to return to the working hypothesis that framed the analysis of data and findings. This study’s working hypothesis is:

*It may be the case that a teacher mentoring program is more embedded in the function of a school district when school and district leadership feel accountable towards the program and the program is believed to sustain other functions and priorities of the school district. If this is the case, it may reflect the resources allocated to and services of the mentoring program.*

I argue that after further analysis of the data from this study and consideration of the findings of the research questions guiding this inquiry, the working hypothesis continues to offer a reliable frame through which to understand the complexities of participants, schools, and districts in this study. However, I argue that the understanding of the term ‘school leadership’ should be expanded beyond that of just the principal to any member of a school who is a key stakeholder and participant in decision making or thinking through the implementation of procedures and programs. This could include but is not limited to mentors. I argue that mentors are often expected to behave in ways to assume a certain amount of responsibility for the mentoring program, and this then positions them as ‘secondary leaders’ in their respective schools. This notion of secondary or ‘distributed’ leadership has been echoed in previous works.
The reason that broadening the understanding of the term school leadership may be critical to understanding findings is that the embeddedness of a mentoring program may be impacted when mentors are positioned as secondary leaders in their schools is a variable. Further discussion of the ways in which the structure of the mentoring program has implications for embeddedness and sustainability will be presented in the following section.

Findings from this study support an argument for three broad categories of practical implications for mentoring programs and beginning teacher learning: purposes and goals of the program; sustainability of the program; and principal leadership. These implications are important for three groups: leaders of mentoring programs; school and district leadership; and the larger education community and education policy makers.

**Practical Implications by Conceptual Category**

**Purposes and Goals of the Program**

When mentors and mentees were asked about the purpose of their respective mentoring programs, they generally articulated similar explanations. By this is meant that participants within a single district as well as those across all the cases had similar explanations for their mentoring programs, that the program was meant to ‘help’ new teachers. The ways in which programs accomplished this purpose was varied (e.g., professional development workshops, mentors being able to observe classes), but the sentiment was fairly consistent. Also, all three districts had written vision statements for their mentoring programs, and there was a fair amount of consistency between the written statement and the enactment of the statement. However, it was reported by two of the districts that the operations of the mentoring program were not necessarily shared or spoken about at staff meetings or at larger, whole district orientations held
at the beginning of the year. What this suggests is that while the purposes and goals of the mentoring program are known and shared among direct participants (of the program), the reasons for the existence, the responsibilities of, and the operational workings of the mentoring program may not be understood by other staff members and teachers in the district which has been reported in previous works to be problematic when trying to develop a shared vision of teacher assistance (Ganser, 2001).

I argue that when the purpose and goals of the program are not shared among all members of the district community, the mentoring program has a tendency to be misunderstood and not to become as embedded in the school or district and can possibly become devalued or deprioritized. One action that could be critical when beginning a mentoring program or during times of leadership transition is to revisit the purpose of a mentoring program and share that with all members of the district, not just participants in the program itself. In addition to sharing the goals of the program, data from this study suggests that it is important to share challenges that beginning teachers may face, such as using a new gradebook to submit grades, in order to manage expectations about what new teachers ought to know and not know and possibly temper frustrations towards beginning staff members. Being clear and explicit about the program can alleviate questions about why the program exists, oversight of the program, and the goals of the program rather than leaving individuals to guess or insert their own meaning. This can lead to inappropriate or unrealistic expectations about the purpose of mentoring and the assistance of new teachers if there are multiple interpretations of the parameters of such a program.

It may also be the case that when the entire community embraces the purpose and goals of the mentoring program, the program can be sustained during times of transition, particularly leadership transition. It appears that if a mentoring program was the vision and enactment of a
single (or small group) dynamic leader, when the leader moves on from the school or the district, the sustainability of the program is in jeopardy. However, having a shared vision of the mentoring program as well as the ways that it positively impacts the schools works to deeper embed the program in the community and culture of the district such that if a new principal or superintendent assumes the leadership role, the mentoring program may be seen as the way that business is done. When beginning a mentoring program or conveying information about a currently existing program, it is important that a consistent message is communicated to all staff members as well as periodic updates as a means to continue bringing the notion of mentoring to the forefront of everyone’s thoughts. Having open lines of communication about the program also allows for a platform for staff members to ask questions or better understand their own role in supporting beginning teacher learning, even if they do not serve as a mentor.

Sustainability of the Program

When considering the sustainability of a mentoring program, there are several variables to take into account that data from this study suggests impacts the capability for continued existence. Whereas having a program become embedded in the function of a school or district supports the valuing and prioritizing of the mentoring program, the following notions speak to ways that programs are structured that can support the sustainability of program. The first variable to consider in the sustainability of a mentoring program is who will be mentoring because who is mentoring matters (Moir, 2003). There are advantages and disadvantages to all models of mentoring. What seems to be the case is that when full time teachers are used as mentors (either solely or in conjunction with a full time district mentor), the program is more likely to be sustained because it is not as costly and can withstand changes to finances of the
district. At a lower cost, utilizing a model of mentoring where full time teachers serve as mentors can be seen as less invasive of financial resources available to the district.

The second variable to consider in the sustainability of a program are the finances dedicated to mentoring. If there are limited resources or future finances are undetermined, it could be beneficial to the sustainability of the program to utilize full time teachers as mentors. Districts have found success utilizing both full and part time models of mentoring, and this supports the notion that there is no single model that can fit every districts’ needs. If finances are limited or future finances are undetermined, a part time mentoring model could serve to ensure the sustainability of the program. It is also an easier transition to move from a part to full time mentoring model than to move from a full time to part time mentoring model. This is because moving from a full time mentor to a full time teacher/part time mentor model often incurs a significant change in job description for an individual. For example, if a district utilized a full time mentor model and the budget no longer allowed for the existence of the program, the person who served as the full time mentor may either be without a job or in a position that is not of their choosing.

A third and final variable to consider in the sustainability of a mentoring program is what components of mentoring will be prioritized. This encompasses such decisions as the teachers who will be served and how the mentoring program will be implemented (i.e., classroom observations, mentor-mentee meetings, beginning teacher workshops, release time for observations of mentors by mentees or mentees by mentors, and training for mentors). There must be alignment between the expectations of the program and the allowances made for the mentoring program. Having greater expectations for the program or the participants of the program than are allowed for (financially or time) can cause frustration by mentees and mentors,
burn out mentors, or the program can be seen as “failing.” The cases in this study all included an internal mechanism (mentor and mentee surveys) for evaluating its usefulness, value, and helpfulness. Leaders of the mentoring programs used and interpreted data from these surveys to determine priorities for the program as well as justify to district leadership resources that are needed to effectively and efficiently operate. However, when there is misalignment between expectations and allowances (too high demands placed on a program that is under resourced), the program may be seen as underperforming and its sustainability is in jeopardy.

*School and District Leadership*

It seems as though beginning teachers enter the profession with certain expectations about the role of the principal or the kind of help that they will receive from the principal. A practical implication for the larger educational institution is to evaluate beliefs about the role of the principal and how this is reflected in both the training of principals and the enactment of the principalship. It appears that even teachers in districts where mentoring programs are in place look to their principals for help. This could be exacerbated in districts where teachers have no formal mentoring, where teachers may look to their principals in the absence of formalized assistance. A more immediate implication of this study is that principals could be explicit with their new teachers about the role that they will play in their support, in the classroom, and leadership of the school. This could help to manage expectations of new teachers towards their leadership and mitigate disappointment or frustration about the kind of support that the teachers are receiving.
Practical Implications by Category of Individuals

The function of a mentoring program crosses multiple groups of individuals. This means that there are several considerations for implementing and running a mentoring program that must be attended to by all groups, while there are also practical implications that pertain to specific groups of individuals with vested interests in the program. This is the result, likely in part, because of the levels at which different decisions are made. The following section will outline implications that this study has found are important for each group of individuals to consider based on their role and relationship to programs offering beginning teacher assistance.

Leaders of Mentoring Programs

The cases in this study had various levels of interactions between those who lead the functions of the mentoring program and members of the school and district leadership. There were many decisions about the function and components of mentoring programs that exist among those who lead the mentoring programs. Because of this, there are two considerations based on the findings from this study that leaders of a mentoring program should consider.

The first consideration for the practical implication of a mentoring program is when to schedule professional development workshops. (All the districts in this study utilized monthly or bi-monthly workshops for participants of the mentoring program.) There was a great deal of variation in the implementation of workshops including differences in the frequency (once a month or bi-monthly), differences in the length (one hour or two hours), and differences in the timing (during the day or after school). In general, teachers reported the difficulty of taking off a day of school to attend a workshop because this required preparation for a classroom substitute in their absence. However, teachers who only experienced after school workshop times reported
difficulty in their ability to always make time to attend the workshops. It may be the case that a combination of during and after school meeting times being utilized for mentoring programs (that wish to offer this support) is able to meet the needs of its participants. Using this in conjunction with frequent program evaluations and surveys of teacher participants could illuminate how to address the schedules, frustrations, and needs of teachers and mentors. Previous literature also supports the notion that it is critical that programs are attentive to the individual needs of program participants rather than approaching mentoring as a ‘one size fits all’ mentality (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992).

The second consideration for mentoring program leaders when developing professional development workshops is around the topics offered. Teachers reported wanting differentiated topics between their first and second years in the programs; in particular, more experienced teachers found less value in classroom management discussions. Teachers found value in practical topics when the workshops were in person. However, one teacher suggested an increase in the use of online networking around more theoretical topics and connections with teachers of similar content. Findings from this study suggest that professional development workshops were a valued structure for teacher learning. It was also critical that the workshops be relevant and convenient to its participants. This means findings from this study do not point to a set group of topics that beginning teachers ought to receive as part of professional development. What is important is that mentoring program leaders find ways to pay attention to the needs of beginning teachers as well as evaluate the success of such workshops.
School and District Leaders

While the leaders and facilitators of mentoring programs find themselves in roles and taking on responsibilities about making programmatic decisions about the implementation of programs to assist new teachers, school and district leaders are generally responsible for structural decisions. This includes such things as monies for programs or professional development, school and individual teaching schedules, and hiring and staffing decisions. The findings from this study about what is valued for beginning teacher learning suggests that there are several practical implications for school and district leaders.

The first consideration for school and district leadership is release time for observations of beginning teachers by their mentors. The philosophies of the mentoring programs in this study were built on the assumptions that having one’s classroom observed by their mentor was a key part of the programs, and this value was reflected in the words of the mentors and mentees as well as the end of year program surveys. Two out of the three cases in this study had some kind of mechanism in place for mentors to observe their teachers, and the mentors from the third case would like this to be a priority for scheduling. What the data from this study suggests is that not only are observations a highly valued structure, but they are considered one of the strongest components of a mentoring program to impact the learning of beginning teachers around such things as classroom and instructional practices. Principals and district leaders are positioned to positively impact the time that mentors have to observe their mentees by making allowances such as covering a mentor’s classroom while they observe their mentee, creating a schedule such that a mentor is not teaching at the same time their mentee is, or hiring substitute teachers to teacher mentor’s classes while they observe their mentee.
A second consideration for school and district leadership is to think through the role, responsibilities, and oversight of classroom assistants in new teachers’ classrooms. Mentors in this study spoke about their observations that beginning teachers with whom they have worked sometimes struggle with how to incorporate classroom assistants (e.g., paraprofessionals) in their classes in order to maximize having another adult in the room. Mentors noted that teachers often were overwhelmed with the idea of managing another adult as they were learning to manage students. Principals and district leaders are in a position to not only help with staffing decisions, but they can also structure the supervision of classroom assistants as to alleviate some of this responsibility from beginning teachers. For example, classroom assistants could be guided by a special education director working in conjunction with the beginning teacher to help make decisions about how to support in a classroom.

The third consideration for school and district leaders in terms of successful implementation and sustaining of mentoring programs is developing a culture of help that is expected, supported, and embraced by all members of the district and learning community (Ganser, 2001; Carver, 2002). Findings from this study suggest that one way a program can become embedded in a school’s culture is utilizing full time classroom teachers as mentors. This is posited to be the case because having multiple members of a school’s community involved in the assistance of beginning teachers helps to norm the expectation that learning to teach continues and being mentored is not a sign of remediation but the way that the district serves a group of teachers. Even if a full time teacher model is not used for mentoring in a district, principals and superintendents can still make the program visible which appears to be the key to normalizing the notion of help among colleagues and a culture of assistance. By keeping the program visible, this could include such actions as principals and district leaders attending new
teacher orientation before the school year begin and asking mentors to report about the activities of the program to the staff or school board.

*Larger Education Community and Education Policymakers*

Findings from this study (as was suggested previously) indicate that it would be beneficial for the larger education community to evaluate its beliefs about the role of the principal in new teacher learning. This could manifest in two of multiple ways. First, principal preparation programs could consider the ways in which principals are taught to think of their role in new teacher learning; what assumptions principals bring with them to their new roles and new teachers in particular; and what knowledge is required on the part of the principal to be an active part of beginning teacher learning and development. (This is not to suggest that principal preparation programs ought to do these, but if we are looking for ways to support beginning teacher learning, this could be one way to do so.) A second way that the education community could embrace the idea of the principal being a meaningful individual in a beginning teacher’s learning is to consider the larger practices associated with teacher evaluation. For example, one participant in the study discussed how her principal would conduct, at the teacher’s request, a “pre-evaluation observation” with the intention of giving specific feedback around learning goals for the teacher. This highlighted an example of the power of formative evaluations. In this particular situation, the pre-evaluation observation grew out of a teacher expressing her anxiety around evaluations in general, but this also proved to have strong potential as a standard practice of teacher supervision and development.

A second consideration for the larger education community is the role of peer assessment in assistance. In New Hampshire, members of the same collective bargaining unit were not
allowed to evaluate one another. This was incredibly influential in the creation of the mentoring programs in each of the three districts in this study because mentors maintained a strict non-evaluative and confidential role. This meant that conversations between mentors and mentees were respected as being private and confidential; conversations that principals did not inquire about nor did mentors reveal to principals. Mentors in this study reported that this kind of confidentiality was critical in developing the trust with their mentees which was the foundation of their working relationship. However, Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) argue that our definition of assessment should be redefined such that supporting a new teacher could include direct feedback around progress towards learning goals such as classroom practices from their mentors. The authors argue that this kind of assessment in an assistance based relationship does not and should not be viewed as violating the non-evaluative stance of mentoring and induction programs.

Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008) uphold the BEST program in Connecticut as an example of a helpful interaction between teacher assistance and assessment. There are several reasons that standardizing this approach as the way that mentors interact with their mentees could prove to be difficult. First, there is the possibility that utilizing an assessment approach in mentoring could jeopardize the trusting relationship between a mentor and mentee. Second, the mentoring programs in this study utilized a reflective mentoring model that worked not only to support the learning of new teachers but also encourage the development of reflective practitioners. It could be the case that including more assessment language in a mentoring relationship could alter the reflective nature of the activity and change the kind of dependency that a mentee has on their mentoring towards thinking about their classroom, content, and instructional practices. Third, the training required for BEST mentor teachers and evaluators is
extensive. It could be the case that the time required to learn how to become an assessor of another teacher’s classroom so that it aligns with school and district teacher evaluations and goals could be so time consuming decreasing the number of full time teachers who are able to also serve as mentors. This does not mean that a mentoring program cannot exist without full time teachers as mentors, but only having full time mentors has implications (as this study found) for the way in which programs become embedded in their schools and districts. The BEST program is mandated for the additional certification levels in the state of Connecticut, so it sustains the certification process in a way that is not seen in New Hampshire.

Limitations of the Study

There are inherent challenges to the methodology of qualitative research studies. In particular, the small sample size of this study (N = 14) means that there is limited ability to generalize findings. Instead, Creswell (2013) and Gobo (2004) encourage that we as qualitative researchers to view findings from qualitative studies as being able to be extended. In particular, Gobo argues that “in qualitative research, generalizability concerns general structures rather than a single social practice” (Gobo, 2004, p. 453). As such, the goal of this study is to present a unit of analysis and working hypothesis through which other districts are able to see themselves, their situation, and working parameters so as to consider the findings and implications from this study. While there are no arguments for statistical significance from these findings, this study represents the lived experiences of participants in mentoring programs, and as such, findings can be useful to guide personnel decisions in schools and districts particularly as they relate to beginning teachers and their mentors.
The intention of this study was to follow a phenomenological orientation as a means to understand the ways in which certain supports were perceived by beginning teachers and other key individuals involved in mentoring programs (e.g., mentors, principals, assistant superintendents). This approach encourages the reliance on understanding the experiences of participants, and because of this, the design of the study relied upon the self-report of participants to discuss and develop their perceptions, beliefs, and values around their experiences of induction supports and mentoring. The use of self-report does not inherently suggest that findings are limited only to the very specific contexts in which data is gathered (i.e., only in states that also do not have teacher support policies in place), but findings from studies that use self-report must be cautiously applied and the implementation constantly evaluated.

I argue that the data collection method follows soundly from the research questions. However, the research questions posed inquire about what beginning teachers value and perceive as being valuable for their learning. The study does not venture to make claims about support structures that are correlated or tied to encouraging beginning teacher learning as measured through evaluations or another teacher performance rubric. What this suggests is that a fundamental limitation of the study is that findings are able to speak to what is important to beginning teachers, but it may be the case that support structures that are valued are not as highly correlated to actual growth or change. One possible counter to this limitation is the use of mentor interviews in this study. Mentors were in a unique position to observe mentees over the course of a year or even two years, and they were able to report on changes that they observed not only in classroom practices of their teachers but also dispositions such as confidence and curriculum knowledge. In two situations, I was able to interview a mentor and their respective mentee, but this was not the case for a majority of participants. The inclusion of interviews from
both the beginning teacher and their mentor could have offered an opportunity for a paired
analysis between reported valued supports and observations of growth. However, mentors often
spoke about beginning teacher growth, learning, and changes in generalities in order to preserve
the confidentiality and trust with their mentees.

At the initial conception of this dissertation, a mixed methods study was proposed to
investigate the research questions. However, one problem that arose with a possible quantitative
component is that this study was situated in a weak policy environment where there were no state
mandates for teacher support. Individual districts may have provided teacher support, but it is up
to the district about what kind of support was offered, by what names different supports were
referred, and how these supports were implemented and realized by the participants. This meant
that there is not necessarily consistency in enactment across districts who offer support even if
the support offered is referred to by the same name. In other words, one challenge of a cross-
case analysis is demonstrating construct validity, that a term is referred to and has similar
meaning across multiple cases.

This reality lead to a possible limitation of this study around being able to draw
conclusions about support structures with the same name across different districts. Throughout
the analysis of this study, it was necessary to be attentive to the way that constructs may vary
among different experiences. This study utilized a phenomenological approach in which
meaning of ideas and terms (i.e. mentoring) was constructed and understood through the
experience of the participants. Ultimately, this study followed a qualitative methodology with a
semi-structured interview protocol that included the use of probing questions. What this
approach allowed was extended conversation with participants around the words that they used
to describe support (e.g., mentoring), how they perceived the support, and components that they
believed were included or excluded when using certain terms. As a means to ensure the highest
degree of construct validity as possible, memos were written throughout the data collection and
analysis process that considered data from individual participants, data within the same district,
as well as data across all three cases in order to define and re-define the meaning and usage of
terms.

Another possible limitation of this study, the recruitment of participants from districts
with well established mentoring programs, presents two possible challenges. First, districts were
recruited for the study because of they had mentoring programs. One mentor noted that she felt
as though her administration liked to speak about the mentoring program to prospective teachers
who were interviewing at the school, but the mentor did not always feel supported at other times.
It may be the case that as teachers were interviewing for positions in the schools, they either
looked for districts that offered beginning teacher assistance or during their interview, the
mentoring program was described, creating a predetermined towards their understanding of
mentoring or teacher support. (When asked during interviews why they chose to work in the
district and school that they did, most teachers in the study reported that it was their first offer for
a job or that it was convenient for a family living situation.) If teachers were actively looking for
districts that offered early career support, in what way could this impact their reports of finding
value in supports for their learning?

It may also be the case that teacher participant in the study were more heavily invested in
their mentoring programs because all the teachers were recommended by their program leaders.
In addition, teachers had to agree to be part of the study, a time commitment above their daily
teaching responsibilities, suggesting a certain level of interest in talking about their experiences
with teacher support. When I asked program leaders about the possibility of interviewing
teachers in the mentoring program, I did not ask for any stipulations for participating (i.e.,
teachers of certain content, grade level, level of commitment to the program, performance in the
classroom). I do not have evidence to suggest that teacher participants in the study were more
invested in their respective mentoring programs than teachers who did not participate in the
study. What I do argue is a possible limitation is that teachers in general who are more invested
in mentoring programs may have different perspectives on what support structures they value for
their learning as compared to other beginning teachers who are not as invested in the mentoring
programs.

It could be that teachers who looked for districts with support had a predisposition
towards seeing value in certain kinds of supports. However, I argue that any possible
predisposition towards seeking a school or district with a mentoring program does not
necessarily negate the value that a teacher reports perceiving through their actual experience of
mentoring. Even teachers who chose a district for its mentoring program would then have a
lived experience of that program that influences their beliefs and perceptions that would either
confirm or misalign with their previous beliefs. This, however, brings about a second limitation
from the recruitment and inclusion of districts in the study: the study does not have the ability to
make comparative claims about the what support structures beginning teachers found helpful for
their learning who teach in districts that do not have formal induction programs.

I argue that the sample of participants recruited for this study follows from the
phenomenological approach used in order to make meaning about constructs related to teacher
mentoring. The study did not include participants (individuals, schools, or districts) without
involvement in mentoring programs, so there are no perspectives to act as an “anchor.” Is it the
case that teachers who do not participate in formal mentoring programs still find value in such
structures as networking with colleagues and feedback from their principals? If so, does this impact the findings about what teachers value for their learning?

**Recommended Future Research**

The findings, practical implications, and limitations from this study encourage and provide the basis for several lines of future research. The process of teacher learning is as lengthy and complex as that of student learning, and it is unlikely that evidence or justifying what may count as evidence of teacher learning can be collected and documented over the course of several months. While the findings from this study are able to speak to what teachers and mentor program personnel value for the learning of beginning teachers, a study that is able to follow teachers over a longer period of time could address research questions about changes in teacher practice and knowledge. A longitudinal study that follows a cohort of teachers over the course of two to three years has the possibility to address some of the limitations of this dissertation study.

First, a study that follows teachers throughout years of their development could rely on multiple measures of evidence for learning including interviews as well as observations of classroom practice. Such a study would combine the notion of self-report with that of observations, utilizing perhaps a rubric of teacher performance. Using multiple measures to understand teacher learning could also address a second limitation of this study which was the ability to find a relationship between beginning teacher supports and changes in practice or knowledge. A longitudinal study has the possibility of detecting actual changes in practice as well as possibly relating such changes to frequency of engaging in certain support structures, such as professional development opportunities or mentoring.
This study found that novice teachers and mentors valued three primary supports for learning in the early years: mentoring, networking with colleagues, and principals. Strong and Baron (2004) conducted a study recently that examined the mentoring conversations between mentor-mentee pairs. However, there have been fewer studies that have examined the networking of colleagues during professional development times particularly for beginning teachers. Darling – Hammond and colleague’s study (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009) suggests that long-term development and classroom change is positively impacted by having consistent and enduring theme across multiple meetings rather than the ‘one hit’ workshop. Findings from this study suggest that further investigation could be worthwhile around the internal structure of workshops for beginning teachers. This could include such inquiries about topics of the workshops, the agenda for time together, and the follow-up expectations for implementation of the information shared. Such a study could be practically beneficial for staff developers, principals, and mentor leaders.

Findings also suggest that novice teachers view their principals as sources of assistance but that frustrations increases when teachers perceived their principal as not having the same view of the principalship as the teacher did. Multiple studies conclude the importance of the principal in new teacher retention and induction (Carver, 2002; Birkeland & Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Moir, 2009) in order to impact such outcomes as retention or job satisfaction, and a recently published study (Vekeman, Devos, & Valcke, 2015) developed a matrix of how principals enacted their role. However, there appear to be fewer (or no) studies that specifically investigate the role of the principal in beginning teacher learning. A potential line of future research could be to look at perceptions of or expectations for their principals in terms of assistance for growth in classroom practices or content knowledge.
Looking Forward

The United States is growing further apart from its global peers in regards to teacher education (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). More frequently, the narrative around transitioning into the teaching profession is one of needing ‘highly effective beginning teachers’ (Duncan, Teacher Preparation: Reforming the Uncertain Profession, 2009) who are equipped to do the same kind of work as more practiced veterans, and a belief that teachers are inadequately prepared at the university level, the root cause of low classroom readiness and ultimately student achievement in P-12 classrooms (Duncan, 2011). This indicates a mindset that learning to teach is an activity isolated at the university and that teachers needing support beyond their teacher preparation program are somehow deficient (Howe, 2006).

It is time for a paradigm shift in American education; one where we take a stance of teacher learning that assumes the continuing education of teachers, particularly through the beginning years. One consequence of the No Child Left Behind legislation is that it encouraged the public to believe that the key to higher student achievement was to increase surveillance of our classrooms (in particular, teachers) and demand more measures of accountability that teachers were doing their jobs (Camera, 2015). We have lost faith in our educators as being competent and caring individuals who are dedicated to their students’ well-being and learning. Instead of focusing on punitive measures aimed at teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs, our time, energy, and resources could be better spent on the question ‘How can we [the public] support you to do the work that we entrust you to do?’ This shift would not come without a price tag, as it would likely require changes in the way we staff schools and prepare mentors and principals for their roles as ‘schoolhouse teacher educators.’ It will also require that
we examine the kind of trust and respect we have for our teachers and teacher educators as *professionals*.

The districts and participants in this study are a testament to the power of positive deviance (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2014) and what a small group of people can do with a firm belief in the assistance of beginning teachers. Still, we need a call for systemic change. The bottom line is that teachers want assistance, feedback, and direct guidance in their classrooms, and we must not be afraid to allow the people who teachers grow to trust (e.g. mentors) to offer these forms of observation about another’s classroom and teaching practices. Teachers are seeing their work during reflective mentoring as different and excluding direct forms of feedback, and this is directly related to the ways in which teachers perceive their learning. We must trust that mentors have their mentees’ best interest at heart, and we cannot hesitate to talk about progress along a spectrum of good teaching and instructional practices with new members of our profession. We need to disentangle the multiple meanings of evaluation so that one can include a mentee’s work with their mentor. We must work to redefine and reimagine evaluation so that conversations about one’s teaching are producing the ‘productive struggle’ of learning.


University of New Hampshire
Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

04-Mar-2015

McCurdy, Kathryn
Education, Murkland Hall
16R Hodder Lane
Framingham, MA 01702

IRB #: 6172
Study: Supporting Early Career Teacher Learning: An Investigation into the Relationship Between Induction Supporters and Early Career Teacher Learning in New Hampshire
Approval Date: 02-Mar-2015

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 110.

Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period, you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. (This document is also available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources.)

Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects. If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,
Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Schram, Thomas
03-Feb-2016

McCurdy, Kathryn
Education, Morrill Hall
16R Hodder Lane
Framingham, MA 01702

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**Review Level:** Expedited  
**Approval Expiration Date:** 03-Feb-2017

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this study. Approval for this study expires on the date indicated above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your study is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

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For the IRB,

[Signature]

Julie F. Simpson  
Director

cc: File  
Schram, Thomas