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THE IMPACT OF A SECOND YEAR OF TEACHER MENTORING

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The College of Education will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

Teacher retention in the United States is an ongoing problem that is affecting students around the country. States, districts, and schools have used many strategies to try to alleviate the teacher shortages. One of the most common strategies utilized is mentoring first year teachers. This mentorship helps establish the teachers in the schools and gives more of an understanding of what teaching is like on a day-to-day basis.

This research specifically examined the potential impacts a second year of mentoring could have on the second-year teacher. In the United States, nine states have moved to mentoring models lasting longer than just one year (Goldrick, 2016). While this number fluctuates over time, there have been efforts around the United States to increase mentoring of novice teachers. This study focused on one school district in South Carolina who keeps the same mentor from year one to year two of a novice teacher's career. Individual interviews with the mentors, second-year teachers, and principals were conducted along with focus group interviews with the mentor and second-year teacher at two schools within the district. All interviews and documents reviewed were looking for impacts of having the same mentor could have on a second-year teacher.

While there were clear implications and benefits for having an assigned mentor in the year of the novice teacher's career, the impacts were not as clear in year two. A case study analysis of each of the individual schools followed by a cross-case analysis led to the overall themes that emerged from the data. The overarching themes were proximity, grade level assignments, and the role of informal mentoring. These emerging themes helped show the potential impacts a second-year of mentoring could have on a second-year teacher.

CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Background of the Problem

Retaining good teachers is an ongoing goal in classrooms across the United States. Retaining classroom teachers became a discussion point in education in the 1980s with the release of several papers on the topic and a study by the federal government entitled The School and Staffing Survey (Ingersoll, 1994). While there does seems to be ebbing and flow to retention since that time, in the last decade, especially after Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19), there has been an increase in the number of teachers leaving the field. The National Center for Education Statistics (2023) stated in the 2020-2021 school year; eight percent of teachers left the teaching field across the United States. Teachers leaving in the early years of their career is an ongoing problem in education due to the fact that it can cost approximately 21,000 dollars to train a new teacher and fill each open position (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Data from the New Teacher Center reported in 2012 new teachers were more common in schools than at any other time over the previous two decades (Goldrick, 2016). With teachers being one of the biggest predictors of student achievement in classrooms, retaining those teachers is important.

One solution to retaining teachers is strong teacher induction programs within school districts. Teacher induction programs have been shown to impact retaining teachers positively (Goldrick, 2016). Evidence shows a strong induction program keeps novice teachers in the field, but Goldrick found there is much variability in what components those induction programs include. Induction programs can include mentoring, required meetings, and observations, just to name a few. Each state and district in the United States (U.S.) can have their own guidance for

what components are included in teacher induction programs. Even with positive research to support the inclusion of induction programs, not all states include induction for first-year teachers.

A strong evidence-based strategy can be included in an induction program that includes some form of mentoring. Mentoring can look quite different in each district or state induction program, but the key piece is a more experienced teacher collaborating with a novice teacher. Schwille (2008) looked at mentoring through the varied and broad lens of emotional support, pedagogical guidance, and understanding of the career of teaching. These three ideas are key to helping the novice teacher gain an understanding of the teaching profession. To take the positives a step further, Walters et al. (2020) also discovered for the mentor, mentoring had a large positive effect on the mentor's teacher practice and teacher identity. Therefore, mentoring can also help retain veteran teachers.

Several key aspects were found to help the mentor and novice teacher work together effectively. One piece found to be most effective with forming mentoring relationships was to make sure the assigned mentor is in the same field as the novice teacher (Biggers et al., 2019). The same field allows there to be a collective understanding of the subject as well as an awareness of challenges that could arise for the novice teacher. Research by Parker et al. (2009) shows also having access to the mentor teacher is another key to the success of the pairing so the mentor being in the same building is important. The ability to be able to see and talk to the mentor during the school day is an important part of building the relationship. Parker et al. also looked at specific guidelines and meeting times to ensure all needs are being met for both the

mentor and the novice teacher. These specifics are helpful to ensure success between the pairings. Many varied pieces work together to help establish a strong mentor and novice teacher relationship.

Additionally, it is important to note nine states include specific requirements for induction to continue for more than one year. Within these nine states, many of them keep the same mentor and general requirements for year two (Goldrick, 2016). Evidence supports keeping the mentor for multiple years if the relationship is a positive one (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). With this knowledge and background, thinking about what could happen in other states if the districts kept the same mentor and novice teacher together for more than one year and whether there would continue to be positive outcomes is a relevant question.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts between having the same mentor for the first and second year of a novice teacher's teaching career. This study helps illustrate the impacts of the continuity of having the same mentor for two consecutive years. Having the same mentor and novice teacher together over two years could allow a stronger relationship to occur. Additionally, based on interview responses, information can be gained on the potential impacts of teacher retention through this increased time to build relationships. Research has shown that solid induction programs are a needed part of retaining teachers. Mentoring is a strong component of a strong induction program and there needs to be more research on other impacts of having the same mentor from one year to the next.

This research used a collective case study approach to have multiple data points that could be studied. Both cases were in the same district, but in two different elementary schools. Exploring whether there are the same outcomes and impacts and making connections between the two cases is important.

Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study was *In an elementary school setting, how does a second year of teacher mentoring impact the second-year teacher?* Two guiding questions helped focus the research study and ensured the overarching research question was answered. The guiding questions were:

- How does having the same mentor for two years impact the second-year teacher?
- What qualities of continuous teacher mentoring impact teachers?

Significance of the Study

This study occurred in South Carolina, a state only requiring a mentor for the induction year for first-year novice teachers. As of the most recent data compiled, nine states require new teachers to undergo induction for two to four years, the state used in this study only requires one year (Goldrick, 2016). Within each district, there are slight differences in how induction looks, and the support received. The selected district has chosen to use the same mentors for new teachers in the second year of their career. This model has been employed in the district for over the last ten years as a district initiative.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. Using two schools within one small rural district affects the ability to generalize the information across varied districts. The study also examines second-year teachers with the same mentor, a situation that may not be consistent in

districts or schools assigning mentors in diverse ways. This variability in size and mentor assigning could also be a potential limitation.

Other potential limitations have to do with the reliability of interview responses. If the interviews were not taken seriously or if the information given was not complete, it could skew the data that was pulled from the interviews. Also, even though consent forms were introduced and signed, a fear of information being released could have kept some information from being stated. These limitations, outside of the control of the research, could affect the outcomes of responses.

Overview of Methodology

This study is a qualitative, collective case study of two schools in the same rural southeastern school district. This methodology was selected as the strongest method for this research to hear the potential impact from current second-year teachers and mentors. Research includes individual interviews of second-year teachers, the assigned mentors, and the principals of each school and then focus groups of the mentor and second-year teachers after the individual interviews. Documents from the state level and district level were investigated throughout the research to add more depth to the study. The case study methodology of these two schools allowed for an in-depth analysis of these two second-year teachers and the mentors.

Two schools in the district met the requirements for the research which allowed for two bounded cases. Each case was analyzed and looked at individually and then the two cases were analyzed for similarities and differences. It is important to note that the two cases were not used to compare against each other but used as ways to look at two separate second-year teachers and the real-life experience that was felt throughout the second-year. This in-depth analysis helps add meaning throughout chapter four and chapter five.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one provides the details on the purpose of the study including the limitations and the significance. Within the organization of the study, an overview is provided. That section ends with a clarification of key terms relevant to the study. Chapter two reviews literature and helps establish the relevance of the study. This relevant literature includes information on new teacher induction and the role it plays in helping retain teachers. Mentoring and mentoring are also reviewed as these terms are key ideas in the study. Chapter three introduces the methodology used in this collective case study. This method was chosen because the collective case study will allow the individuals within two elementary schools in one district to provide multiple data points based on the research question. Yin (2018) also notes a collective case study helps prepare a more robust and compelling study.

Clarification of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. This clarification of terms explains how the terms are used in this research. This clarification of these words will add clarity to the research.

Induction: Teacher induction is a more extensive system of support offered to teachers through the district or school (Potemski & Matlach, 2014). This support is offered to first year teachers to bridge the gap between practice and knowledge.

Mentoring: A partnership where collaborative sharing of knowledge and mutual interests are the key to the success of a novice teacher (Tillman, 2005). This research focuses on mentoring that has occurred with the novice teacher over the course of two years.

Collective Case Study: Yin (2018) describes a collective case study as a study containing more than one case. The cases used in this study are across two different schools. Data will be compiled separately from both cases.

Novice Teacher: A novice teacher is a teacher in his or her first year of teaching.

Second-year teacher: A teacher who has completed his or her first year of teaching and has started the second year of teaching.

Continuous Mentoring: Continuous mentoring is mentoring occurring during the first and second year of a novice teacher's career, which includes the same mentor.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the entire study and introduced the key ideas and concepts appearing throughout the research. The following chapters will add explanation and depth to what was presented in this chapter. A brief introduction of the why behind the chosen research questions was included in this section, and chapter two will provide more literature looking at the history of teacher retention and why a second-year of mentoring could be impactful. Chapter three will include more detail on the specific methodology that was introduced in this section as a collective case study approach. Chapter four was written to provide the finding and chapter five shares the discussion and results of the case study research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring, while not a new idea in education, has had renewed focus over the last four decades. This renewed focus on mentoring is because mentoring is playing a more prominent role in teacher retention. While there are many ideas about what constitutes strong teacher mentoring, this literature review explores the background and idea of mentoring of novice teachers through their induction year. The value of mentoring of novice teachers has been researched extensively and this literature review will look at key ideas.

Teacher Mentoring

Mentoring is a style of learning that has occurred and been documented all throughout history. Plato and Socrates were paired as mentor and mentee in the fourth and fifth centuries (Vierstraete, 2005). Vierstraete pointed out mentoring, specific to education, can be traced back to the 1800s when teachers started in the teaching profession by being in the classroom of experienced teachers. Those new teachers learned from their mentors and then branched out to careers in their own classrooms. While today's educators start with more defined education pathways through college or other alternative methods into the classroom, the role of a mentor is still to guide the new educator towards success in the classroom.

Definition of Mentoring

There are variations in the specific definitions of mentoring, but all definitions focus on the purpose of relieving the feeling of isolation in the classroom for new teachers (Clark & Byrnes, 2012; Vierstraete, 2005). This isolation in the classroom can play a strong role in whether a teacher stays or leaves the profession. Another definition adding to the idea of a connection between the mentor and novice teachers can be found in writings by McCann and Orzulak (2012), who describe mentoring as a human relationship. For clarity on the purpose of

mentoring, the focus needs to be explored starting in the 1980's in the United States education system. Mentoring was used as part of the education system reform to reward and retain capable teachers (Little, 1990) Little found mentoring became prominent in education in the early 1980s as a favored strategy for the training of new teachers with a mentor, or expert to guide the novice teacher through the first year. The expert guide helped to establish more of a human relationship with another adult in the building. While this definition will suffice to help explain the purpose behind an increased focus on mentoring, there are many others who have also worked to define mentoring's current role in education. Further, Tillman (2005) described mentoring as a partnership where collaborative sharing of knowledge and mutual interests are the key to the success of the novice teacher. Schwille (2008) looked at mentoring through the varied and broad lens of emotional support, pedagogical guidance, and understanding of the career of teaching. Within these varied views, mentoring is meant to grow the novice teacher in confidence as well as professionally long-term (Schwille, 2008).

Both Chambers et al. (2015) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) further defined mentoring as a partnership providing specific benefits to both mentors and novice teachers. It is important to note a more experienced mentor works with a novice teacher and they work together to gain and develop stronger instructional practices and classroom pedagogy. While the less experienced teacher could learn from the expert guide, Little's (1990) research found mentoring also has positive outcomes for the mentor. The mentor will gain public acknowledgment of their mentoring skills while the novice teacher will gain knowledge from the mentor (Little, 1990). The additional positive of the mentor gaining experience and expertise from the new teacher is not the purpose of mentoring but is an additional benefit for both educators.

This benefit for both educators can be seen in the work by Walters et al. (2020) who discovered for the mentor, mentoring had a large positive effect on the mentor teacher's practice and teacher identity. Research by Mathur et al. (2012), also corroborated this data. While Walters et al. had a case study of three participants, Mathur et al. had a larger study of 66 novice teachers. In the study by Mathur et al., mentoring was used as a method to try to retain those novice teachers. It is important to note mentors were assigned and trained at the district level but were matched at the building level by the content teachers were teaching. An interesting outcome of this study showed mentors always viewed themselves as more confident. Mathur et al. stated the only area where the mentors did not score themselves as high was in areas concerning district/state assessments. With overall satisfaction, the mentors were overall more satisfied with the process and experience, and "6 of the 41 mentee respondents rated the experience as negative, or very negative" (Mathur et al., 2012, p. 160). The focus on the mentors and their confidence was interesting.

While there can be positive aspects for the mentor, the focus for the next section is on the novice teacher. The novice teacher has several pathways to enter education, there is a high possibility they will start their teaching career in an induction program. As part of an induction program, mentoring has shown to positively impact teacher retention and keeps teachers in the classroom (Goldrick, 2016). There are a variety of reasons for this, but this section will focus on the impact of a strong mentor relationship with a novice teacher. No matter the type of mentoring, there can be an impact.

Formal Mentoring Versus Informal Mentoring

With the variation in mentoring styles and state and district requirements, there can be variations in what strong mentoring looks like across different schools and districts. For

example, there are two types of recognized mentoring styles: formal and informal mentoring. Formal mentoring by definition is mentoring that is more formalized, with assigned mentors and typically lasts from 6-12 months (Kram, 1985). Formal mentoring is often focused on specific goals and has the output of submitting information to whomever assigned the partnership (Ragins et al., 2000). Informal mentoring tends to be more spontaneous; more friendship based and lasts over the course of several years (Kram, 1985). Informal mentoring tends to have longer lasting outcomes because the partnership is more friendship based and more focused on long-term goals versus short-term goals or requirements (Ragins et al., 2000). While neither is right nor wrong, this research study focused on formal mentoring where mentors are assigned within the school building and are paired with a novice teacher.

For formal mentoring, the assignment of mentors being matched with the new teacher has been shown to influence the outcomes of several studies. Both mentor and novice teacher having input into the matching process relate to perceived program effectiveness through their relationships with mentor commitment and program understanding (Parker et al., 2009). Having input into the chosen pairings as well as having similar teaching backgrounds has been shown to be effective for the relationship. Kardos and Johnson (2010) found new teachers in lower socio-economic schools were less likely to have mentors in the same grade or subject area and having a mentor in the same grade or subject area can significantly increase the potential for new teachers to return the next year. Subjects such as mathematics and science are more likely not to have mentors who match their subjects, which is a problem. Biggers et al. (2019) looked at how public institutions chose mentors for science placements. It was found through these surveys that most mentors were chosen by word of mouth either from a school administrator or someone who knew someone at the university level. The type of science content taught did not necessarily

serve as a factor in selecting mentors in this study. This lack of focus, specifically on science content, has been shown previously to be an ongoing issue in science teacher retention. This lack of content matching, specifically in mathematics and science, can have an impact on the retention outcomes of the new teachers (Biggers et al., 2019).

Another mentoring piece that can be effective no matter whether formal or informal mentoring is what happens when the mentoring is occurring between the mentor teacher and the novice teacher. Many states set requirements and guidelines for what occurs during mentorship. The next section will identify specific state requirements, including South Carolina.

State Mentoring Requirements

The National Association of State Boards provides a framework and recommendations for states to use, but each state makes its own decisions on the induction and mentoring model that it chooses to use (National Association of State Boards, 2018). Some states' directives encompass the whole state, while others give more autonomy to make decisions in counties or districts. For example, in North Carolina (NC), beginning teachers are required to participate in a three-year induction period (Parker et al., 2009). The National Mentor Task Force in NC in 2008 reviewed their standards and added a third required year of induction with the first two years having guaranteed mentor support. This was a change from their original 1998 document that only required two years of induction. The policy also goes on to clearly state expectations for choosing mentors including a proficient rating from the administration, time to mentor the novice teacher, as well as other requirements. This contrasts with South Carolina (SC), where the state policy states that districts must use a plan and craft their own plans for induction in each district (2017 Induction and Mentoring Guidelines, 2017). Each school district creates a plan based on the requirements, sends it in to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) for

approval, and once approved, can establish a mentoring program. A mentor in SC is only required for a first-year teacher or a teacher with an annual contract who requires classroom assistance. The state allows mentoring to be optional for any other certification level (2017 Induction and Mentoring Guidelines, 2017). There are state guidelines for the mentor/mentee relationship, but the districts have the final say in the components of their relationship that will be utilized. With these two neighboring states, it is easy to see the variance within states and regions of the United States. These variations in induction and mentoring can matter for retaining teachers in the classroom.

Positive Impacts of Mentoring

Mentoring has been shown to have positive impacts. Teachers who are mentored early in their teaching career are more likely to stay in the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The survey by Kardos and Johnson (2010) found that over 58% of the respondents had only had three or fewer in-person conversations about classroom management and/or discipline with their mentor. Also, less than 50% had been observed by their mentor in actual teaching situations. While having a mentor is a positive step, and most new teachers have had a mentor, there are still many ways to improve effective mentoring practices. A study that followed seven secondary mathematics teachers in South Dakota who were in their first through third year of teaching looked at the lived experiences of being mentored, what teachers ascribe to these encounters, and what mentoring strategies are seen as most beneficial (Pomerenke et al., 2022). From the seven individuals, Pomerenke et al. found four general themes emerging: varied support, support from colleagues, observations and feedback, and expectations. The seven mentors were outside the schools of those being mentored. This caused the largest struggle with the mentees because if they needed immediate help, the mentor might not be available to assist. Another

recommendation from the survey by Pomerenke et al. was for the mentor and the new teacher to have specified times to meet and establish clear goals. This would encourage the pair to be focused and have clearly desired outcomes. Kardos and Johnson (2010) found through their research that clear goals, established expectations, and availability to meet with the mentor are all traits of a successful mentor and novice teacher match. Knowing the basic requirements for a successful partnership to help novice teachers gain familiarity in the classroom, states can play a significant role in establishing the necessary parts of the mentoring process.

Long-Term Mentoring

Many findings were discovered that contributed to the success of ongoing mentoring or mentoring for the same teacher for more than one year. Mentors needed to be selected or chosen from exemplary teachers (Thornton, 2014). Once exemplary teachers were selected confidence of the mentor built over time as more mentoring occurred. Another piece Thornton discovered helped was ongoing mentor training or some relevant type of professional development that allowed for growth specific to the mentor. This ongoing professional development process allows for reflection and reminders of best practices with mentees. The only true barrier shown by mentors had more to do with their district limitations of the mentor roles than with the mentors themselves. A district or school that controlled more of the mentor/mentee relationship was not seen as effective. A mentor needs to have some freedom within their role to feel most effective.

While there have been positive results for mentoring the same teacher for more than one year, only nine states require more than two years of induction or mentoring support of new teachers (Goldrick, 2016). This number continues to change and shift as funding changes and new officials are elected in each state. Also, large scale legislation such as No Child Left Behind

plays a role in what occurs at the state-level with new teacher induction. While each state has a general skeleton of what induction can look like, it can shift and change slightly from year to year with substantial changes at the state level coming every so often. The relationship and contact between the second-year teacher and the mentor teacher play a critical role in the relationship. With so much variability in states and requirements, there has not been as much research on the benefits of specifically a second year of mentoring with the same mentor. The next section will focus on the positive impacts of a strong mentoring relationship.

Mentoring in the Second Year

It can be hard to isolate teacher data to the second year of a teacher's career. Most data reports teachers leaving or moving schools within the first five years and does not specifically focus on year two. Yet, there is some emerging information focusing specifically on year two. Hobson and Ashby (2012) explain that while a mentor during the first year of a teacher's career can alleviate some of the culture shock and help adjust to the job, removing the mentor role during year two can still create a reality aftershock. This real aftershock can play an influential role in whether a teacher stays or leaves teachers.

Even though a second-year teacher is not new to the job, the job shifts and changes every year depending on students, school staffing, and administration. Day et al. (2008) categorized teacher's professional lives into six broad categories based on years of experience. The years of experience are grouped by 0-3 years, 4-7 years, 8-15 years, 16-23 years, 24-30 years, and 31 plus years teaching experience. Teachers in years one through three are still considered to be in the group labeled early career teachers. These novice teachers are still learning how to teach effectively, learn about the school environment, and adapt to dealing with students and parents. Year two brings a whole new group of students to work through the process again. While there

are parts of the job that will be easier, the second year can be a time to focus on current ideas and experiment with teaching methods. Research by Curtis and Larsen (2024) supported the idea with a survey showing both mentors and second-year teachers agreed mentoring should be about exploring new and creative ways of doing things. Curtis and Larsen also found topic selection of mentor and second-year discussions also evolved to more discussion about classroom management refinement, differentiation, and how to manage the day-to-day workload. The second-year teachers are learning how to manage parts of the job effectively and broadening to ask different questions and focus on different areas of need. It can only be concluded that teacher mentorship positively impacts teacher retention.

Teacher Retention

Teachers are the biggest predictor of student achievement in classrooms, and retaining those teachers is important (Nguyen & Springer, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2023) stated that in the 2020-2021 school year, eight percent of teachers left the field across the United States. While this has been unchanged over the previous decade at the time of the research, teacher attrition and the retention of teachers are essential data points when looking at education. Teacher shortages and teacher retention have been a focus of education for decades. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (p.19) found that "severe shortages of certain kinds of teachers exist: in the fields of mathematics, science, and foreign languages; and among education specialists." A Gallup Poll in 2014 only showed this trend continuing with the data added that teaching was recognized as one of the most stressful positions and on a similar scale to the stress level of doctors.

Teacher retention is not only a problem in the United States. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that while eight percent of teachers were leaving the field annually in

the United States, this was noticeably higher than in other high-achieving countries. The other countries had rates that were four percent or less and this stood out as a noticeable difference (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Ingersoll (2001) stated that any amount of turnover causes excess demand and creates a revolving door within the education system. This revolving door leads to additional pressures and concerns to keep novice teachers in the field.

It is not only teachers leaving the field that can be a problem. This problem also includes teachers leaving a school and moving to another school. The school the teacher left from is still forced to find a new teacher to fill the vacant spot and train a teacher based on the school requirements. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) point out losing a teacher regardless of attrition or mobility between schools has the same effect on a school.

Another area of concern is teachers leaving rural schools. Rural schools account for 7.3 to 9.3 million school age children depending on the specific definition of rural (Hartman, et al., 2023). This means that there are more rural school age children than students in the largest 100 school districts in the United States. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) looked at data focused on rural school populations and found that teachers were more likely to leave rural school to move to suburban or urban schools than the opposite happening. Research by Ingersoll and Tran, showed over the last few decades, there have been large scale demographic changes that have caused the student enrollment to decrease by about a fifth, whereas in urban and suburban, the school-age populations grew by about a fifth. This would lead to the expectation that positions are easier to fill in rural schools and this is not true. Ingersoll and Tran reported rural schools as consistently having positions that were not filled and the reason for teachers leaving the rural schools was found to be job dissatisfaction. This led to teachers leaving before retirement age. This ongoing struggle with teacher retention in rural schools is another important piece to note because job

dissatisfaction and teachers leaving affects the pool of available mentor teachers for novice teachers entering the district.

In this time after COVID-19, it is important to look at the potential impact that this time period had on teacher attrition and retention. Novice teachers that graduated during the pandemic are just now in their fourth or fifth year of teaching. Student teaching was a vastly unique experience for them if they were able to accomplish student teaching at all due to COVID-19 school restrictions. The novice teachers who came into education right after the pandemic were not allowed as much time in the classroom during student teaching and expectations were different based on state and college requirements. While it is hard to see the true outcome of teacher retention overall after COVID-19 because different schools, states, and districts had different plans they followed with regards to the daily teaching in classrooms after COVID-19. Gillani et al, (2022) reported that veteran teachers were at higher odds of leaving the profession after the pandemic as opposed to the same age group before the pandemic. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) reported that the stress of the pandemic caused a drop in the supply of new teachers entering the profession as well as an increase in teachers leaving before retirement age. It is hard to be able to compare the data to previous years since there has not been any large-scale data to look at since the end of the pandemic, only data specific to certain locations or student populations. Yet, the data reported from those locations show teachers leaving the field now due to increased levels of stress, but it is too soon to know how this data compares to previous decades of data.

Reasons to Retain Teachers

Retaining current classroom teachers is important and especially because the number of teacher candidates entering the profession has decreased after COVID-19. Sutcher et al., (2019)

found that between 2009 and 2014, teacher preparation enrollments declined by 35 percent. This limited availability of new teachers significantly impacts the number of teachers able to enter the teaching field. Therefore, when new teachers do enter the field, they leave by up to 50% within the first five years (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). This turnover can have a substantial impact on districts without the necessary new teachers coming into the profession.

There are many reasons that teachers need to be retained. One of the biggest reasons to retain qualified teachers is cost, one study found that replacing teachers who leave can cost in today's dollars as much as $21,000 per teacher in a large urban district (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). This cost can be a huge detriment to districts and can amount to eight and a half billion dollars for the United States (Carroll, 2007). Another reason for keeping teachers is "good teachers are the most important determinant of student achievement" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 7). Teachers who leave classrooms are affecting the learning environment of the students in the school and this can affect student learning (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Keeping highly qualified teachers in the classroom is the key to student success and learning and strong mentoring policies can help keep those teachers in the classroom.

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond's (2019) research published in that moment of uncertainty right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic allows for a unique perspective now looking back. The confusion and unknown challenged all levels of teachers and created an opportunity for teams and collaboration born out of necessity. It is also noted that supporting new teachers would be even more important with all the changes in education. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) state that new teachers whose student-teaching was altered by

COVID-19 would need additional support and mentoring to manage the changes within education.

Methods to Retain Teachers

Many methods have been studied on how to retain teachers in the classroom. Koerber et al. (2023) looked at retention through the lens of human motivation. Humans are motivated by three basic needs of achievement, affiliation, and power. While not everyone is motivated by the same level of each of these three ideas, Koerber et al. found they all play a role in teacher retention. This lens of motivation can lead to the areas where teachers could meet those needs through professional development, a strong mentoring and learning community, and a strong supportive administration.

Administrators have been shown to positively impact teacher retention (Sutcher et al., 2019). A strong administrator who allows teachers some autonomy is a strong reason that some teachers decide to stay in the classroom (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). The study by Frahm and Cianca focused on rural teacher education, but from this research, it was reinforced that strong authentic relationships were one of the keys to keeping teachers in the classroom. Frahm and Cianca found the visibility of the principal helps create more positive interactions. Also, districts can spend time ensuring administrators enter leadership roles prepared and ready to collaborate with teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The collaboration and the ability to collaborate are key to success. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond found administrators who support their teachers and have the skills necessary to support them are more likely to retain the teachers in their building. This is one more piece in the puzzle to keep teachers in the classroom.

Mentoring new teachers can have varied methods depending on the district or school. However, a structured mentoring program can meet the new teachers' needs for achievement and

affiliation and help retention (Koerber et al., 2023). Mentors can provide a powerful force to keep novice teachers in the classroom (Parker et al., 2009). Cells et al. (2019) research shows that it can take teachers from three to seven years to feel they have become effective in their teaching and this feeling of effectiveness is a positive motivator for teacher retention. A mentor can also provide motivation and affiliation goals required to stay in the classroom (Koerber et al., 2023). Koerber et al. also noted that while each of those three ideas is important, "this theory is also contingent upon the idea that individuals will be more likely motivated, retained, and successful when each of their specific and separate needs are met" (p. 13). Meeting the needs of the novice teaching through mentoring is key to success of the partnership. From the research, mentoring was shown to be one of the most effective interventions to keep staff happy and employed by meeting many of the needs required. While having a mentor can be significant, what that mentoring relationship looks like can have a powerful effect on teacher retention.

Teacher Induction

Mentoring and induction are often used synonymously, but they are different and play separate roles in teacher development. Teacher induction is a more extensive system of support offered to teachers through the district or school (Potemski & Matlach, 2014). As of 2020, thirty-one states required some form of induction and mentoring for novice teachers (Education Commission of the States, 2020). It is important to note that teacher induction is not seen as additional training but is often considered a bridge between beginning teacher training outside of the classroom and teaching on their own as individual classroom teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The lines can be blurred though, and this is especially true because there are so many varied forms of induction. Induction could consist of meetings, workshops, seminars, and mentoring or any combination of these ideas, but Smith and Ingersoll did find teachers who were

part of a comprehensive program that consisted of several of the above-mentioned ideas were more likely to stay in the profession than those who only received a limited amount of support. Research noted,

> When asked about their participation in specific elements of induction, 73% reported receiving mentoring, 78% reported receiving regular supportive communication with principals and administrators, 64% reported receiving seminars or classes for beginning teachers, 58% reported receiving common planning time with teachers in their subject, and 12% reported receiving a reduced teaching schedule (Podolsky et al, 2019, p. 16).

Because of the variance of possibilities, a clarity of the definition of induction for education is needed to understand the role that induction can play in teacher retention. As well as the simple reason that districts want to retain teachers, keeping teachers in the classrooms helps build teacher self-efficacy and helps those teachers grow professionally.

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) noted that while many other types of occupations had induction programs, education was slow to enact strong induction programs to train new teachers. Much of the daily teaching that teachers do is done in isolation and that can be lonely and stressful as well as lead to teachers leaving the field sooner (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This prevalence of teachers leaving the field is an ongoing issue. An increase in induction programs is prevalent in education with over 90% of first-year teachers in 2008 reported being part of an induction program which is up from 50% in 1990 (Ingersoll, 2012). Most correlational studies that have been completed do show that teacher induction increases the retention of new teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). There is an ebb and flow to teacher induction programs though and the research shows a constant shifting of state's requirements and initiatives.

Within a comprehensive induction program, mentoring is considered one of the facets of an effective induction program (Potemski & Matlach, 2014). Ingersoll (2004) posited that in the prior twenty years, mentoring had become the prominent piece that was used most in teacher induction. Mentoring can look quite different depending on the requirements because the role mentoring plays in teacher induction is based on the state, district, or even school-level decisions, depending on the state's law requirements. In most states, a mentor is assigned to a novice teacher for one year. After the induction period, the mentor is no longer required to meet with the new teacher. Research by Clark and Byrnes (2012) in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States found two critical components of a strong mentoring relationship. Mentoring has been used more readily as an induction support because it has been shown to have a strong positive impact on keeping new teachers in the classroom. Clark and Byrnes found that the two most frequent mentor activities that showed positive correlations were "the mentor being a good listener and the mentor encouraging the novice teacher during times of self-doubt" (p. 49). These activities can help transition the novice, novice teacher into a more experienced teacher within the state's induction program.

Teacher induction has also been shown to have a strong impact on teacher retention. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that well-designed induction programs were more likely to keep teachers in the field at higher rates as well as could lead to improved student learning in the classroom. Mentoring is one piece of the teacher induction puzzle that is important and can help retain teachers for the long-term. It is also important to look at teacher retention and mentorship through the lens of leadership and the role the school and principal can play in teacher retention.

Educational Leadership

Teachers do not work in solitary environments in the school setting. There are other teachers, instructional leaders, and administration that play a role daily in what is happening in the school classrooms. For the purposes of teacher retention, the mentor does play a role with the novice and second-year teacher, but other individuals can play an impact as well. This all starts with the principal who hires the novice teacher. This principal has a vision for the layout and structure for the school and this ties into Bolman and Deal's (2021) structural frame. Bolman and Deal state, "the right mixture of strategy roles, relationships and coordination is essential to collective performance" (p. 49). Relationships and coordination tie in specifically to the structural frame and connect to retention and mentoring. The principal hires the novice teacher because he or she fits into the role needed in the school. Of note though, while the principal hired the novice teacher with the belief that he or she would be a good fit for the school, Johnson et al. (2012) found evidence that a teachers' desire to leave is influenced partially by the role school leadership plays in the day-to-day school environment. Once the principal hires the novice teacher, the principal needs to have a school environment that is structurally sound to keep the teachers in the building.

Bolman and Deal (2021) proposed a leader's effectiveness diminishes when the leader cannot frame and then reframe situations to formulate the best decision. It can be hard to look at situations simply through the lens of one frame. In addition to the structural frame, the other frames are the human resources, political, and symbolic frames. All of the frames play a vital role. Bolman and Deal posited that effective leaders use multiple frames for most decision-making processes. The frames used matter and in a school the structural and human resource frames can be vital in the daily operations of the school. Yes, the people within the walls of the

school matter, but without a strong, inclusive structure, nothing will be accomplished. It is important to note the other two frames do play a role in schools, but in different manners. Within schools, teachers and students need a symbolic framework to encourage and give an end goal or purpose for their daily jobs. The political frame is important to create groups within the school who can work together for the common good and for a principal to understand various groups and their roles. A school is only as effective as the teachers teaching effectively, students learning, and parents supporting the learning process. Looking through the frames helps create a cohesive framework to run the school.

Mentors are one of those roles that principals could assign and play a key role in the school structure. Not all principals assign mentors; sometimes, it can be district office personnel who assign mentors. Regardless of who assigns the mentor to the novice teacher, the mentor plays a specific role within the school. The mentor's purpose is to support the novice teacher in multiple ways, depending on the school or district. This can vary because of the structure established by the district for who controls mentoring. An awareness of this structure is important for the novice teacher and mentor. Mentors who are teacher leaders could also have more flexibility and understanding in their role based on the structure of the school. All these factors and the human resource and structural frames can influence the relationship between the mentor and novice teacher.

Novice teachers benefit from a mentor who is in their same field and will be the best fit for them (Biggers et al., 2019). The planning for the ability to coordinate the partnership is key to thinking through relationships that will have the best benefit for success. Johnson (2006) points out a principal is aware novice teachers need support, and a skillful leader uses the teachers in the school to create a network of teachers to work together. Bolman and Deal (2021) focus on the

human resources frame as a focus on empowerment for the individuals to achieve success. This achievement can be found through ongoing mentoring and creating relationships within the school that gives support and guidance to allow the novice teacher to be successful.

Summary

Teacher retention is an ongoing issue with the United States public education system. While there can be many reasons for teachers to leave, teacher induction was created to help alleviate first year novice teacher's stress. Within state and district induction programs, having a mentor for the first year of a novice teacher's career is positively correlated with increased teacher self-efficacy, but there are many other variables that can affect the relationship. Research supports the importance of novice teachers having a mentor, but the mentor and novice teacher relationship is very dependent on the state and district the pair resides within. While having a mentor is important for at least one year, few research studies have specifically studied having a mentor for more than one year, but the research that exists does support that increasing the number of years a teacher has a mentor can be incredibly beneficial. This relationship can also lead to other impacts that are extremely dependent on what is happening between the mentor and novice teacher.

When looking at the relationship between mentors and novice teachers, many factors have been reviewed in chapter two. Teacher retention, school dynamics, district expectations, and the school principal, each of these play a role in the mentor and novice teacher relationship. Chapter three will focus on how the study of the mentors and novice teachers will be conducted to study the impacts.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD AND PROCEDURES

This research focuses on the specific impacts of continuous mentoring on a second-year teacher by the same mentor. To learn about these impacts, a collective case study focused on two teachers in their second year of teaching along with their mentors. This section details the specific methodology utilized for the research study. This study also examined the participants, setting, and procedures to support the research and answer the research questions.

Research Design

Research supports having a mentor for one year will positively impact a novice teacher. This study focused on the potential impacts of continuous mentoring on a second-year teacher during the second year of teaching. To look at that impact, this study was a qualitative case study and focused on the specifics provided by the mentors and second-year teachers. This study's overarching research question is, *In an elementary school setting, how does a second year of teacher mentoring impact the second-year teacher?* Two guiding questions helped focus the research study:

- How does having the same mentor for two years impact the second-year teacher?
- What qualities of continuous teacher mentoring impact teachers?

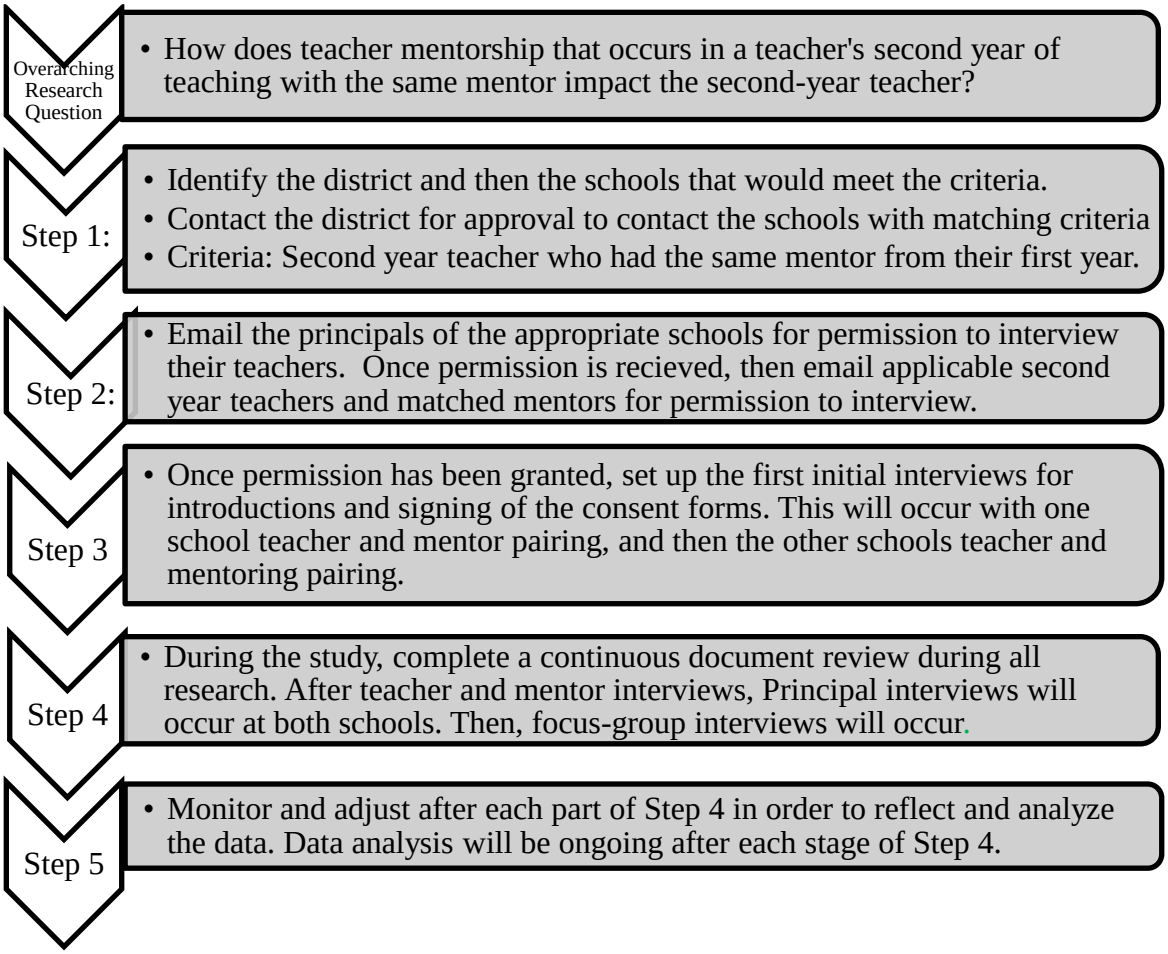
This study was a qualitative, collective case study of two schools within the same rural district. The collective case study approach allowed the individuals within two elementary schools in one district to provide multiple data points with the research questions. Hamilton and Corbitt-Whittier (2013) explain that using a case study approach could allow the framing of ideas and provide guiding principles to solidify the research basis. A collective case study will enable multiple viewpoints to engage with the research question and deepen the research. Yin (2018) also points out a collective case study approach helps prepare a more robust and compelling

study. Instead of another method, the collective case study methodology aims to study two similar situations in-depth to generalize to similar cases (Privetera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). While the data will not be generalizable to the general population of teachers, studying individual instances of second-year mentoring in depth is worthwhile. Since two different schools in the same district will be part of the research study, this allowed a broader perspective on the research questions.

Looking at a case study through the worldview of social constructivism allows the researcher to explore and try to make meaning of the world around them (Creswell, 2009). Everyone makes sense of the world using their own historical and social constructs; thus, case study research uses the lens and perceptions of the researcher to understand the view of others (Creswell, 2009). Having multiple people interviewed in the case studies gives more perspectives to help make meaning based on the research questions. Learning by studying others is the goal of the research case study, and the researcher gains meaning from the lived perspectives of others (Creswell, 2009). The overarching research design is shown in Figure 3.1 as an overview for understanding the process of completing the research.

Figure 3.1

Case Study Research Design



Study Focus

This research focuses on collecting rich data from the study within the context of the community or organization and the two selected elementary schools (Hamilton & Corbitt-Whittier, 2013). Using a case study to collect rich and varied data from the sources is an important reason for the intended use of this methodology. Collecting multiple data pieces from both schools helped create a deeper understanding and provided enough context to derive meaning from the study.

This research study followed a case study design. The justification is that a case study follows an in-depth study of the research questions. “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2018, p. 1). Research questions created using a why question help focus the study on the personal experience and impact of being a second-year teacher mentored by the same person for more than one year.

In particular, the collective case study allows the researcher to look at two different schools within the same district and develop an understanding of the differences and similarities. The overarching district goals are the same, but what mentoring looks like in each school could vary. Each school will be considered a unit of study, or bounded study (Stake, 1995). With two bounded units of study, the final research will be able to be analyzed to provide depth of the participants' thoughts about the possible impacts of a second year of mentoring. Using two schools and interviews with multiple stakeholders also allows for the collection of rich data to capture the complexity of the cases studied (Hamilton & Corbitt-Whittier, 2013). The focus-group interviews between the mentor and second-year teacher together and the review of any pertinent district documents also provided rich data.

This study occurred in two elementary schools in the southeastern United States, both within the same rural district. The participants were second-year teachers who have completed their first year of teaching and are in their second year. The study also included the mentors assigned to the second-year teachers and the school principals. While mentors are a necessary piece because mentors can provide a powerful force to keep novice teachers in the classroom, the school principals can provide a different lens to look at the impact on the second-year teacher

(Parker et al., 2009). Principals play a huge role in the school and the questions during the individual interviews will focus on the perception that is seen from the viewpoint of the principal.

Research Sites

The research sites were selected due to using second-year mentors and the school district's willingness to participate in the study. The participant selection was based on the teachers who fit the criteria needed for the research. The state only requires a mentor to be assigned for one year, but the research site district has chosen to use the same mentor for a teacher's second year. Of the four available elementary schools in the district, two were selected because the schools had participants in their second year with the same mentor. While both elementary schools are within the same district, some key differences set them apart based on the economic level of students, teacher numbers, and a principal change at one school. This section will detail the similarities and differences as well as the key participants.

District Setting

The setting of this research study is a small, rural school district in the southeastern United States. The district is one of 73 districts in the state and has six schools that serve 3,005 students pk-12th grade (United States Department of Education (USDE), 2024). Within the district, four elementary schools feed into one middle school and one high school. Within those six schools there are 206 teachers and an overall student-teacher ratio of 15 students per teacher (Census Reporter, 2022). The student demographics of the district are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

District Student Demographics

Ethnicity	Percentage of student population within district
Asian	0.9
American Indian	0.2
Hispanic	5.4
Black	13.5
White	74.1
Two or more	5.8

The community's median income is 71,327, approximately 8,000 higher than the state average but almost 4,000 below the national average (USDE, 2024). The community is 86% white and 79% of those working age are within the labor force (Census Reporter, 2022). The USDE also reports over seventy percent of the population has some college education or higher degrees and over three-fourths of the students within the district live in a two-parent household. Regarding poverty, the USDE reports 11% live in poverty based on the national criteria and the number living in poverty is lower than the state average of 17% at the poverty level. While this data has only changed slightly over the last few years since the 2020 census, there has been significant population growth with new buildings and developments in the local area that have not yet made any changes but have the potential to increase study enrollment quickly (Census Reporter, 2022).

School Setting

This study will focus on two elementary schools within the district. The schools have similar enrollments, with one having 532 students and the other 453 students (SC School Report Card, 2024). The school with more students will be called School A, and the school with fewer students will be School B.

While both schools are within the same school district and have many similarities, some differences can account for significant differences in school outcomes. School A has a lower percentage of inexperienced teachers of 12.8%, while School B has 18.8% (SC School Report Card, 2024). Even this difference in percentages can make a significant difference when you look at the number of students impacted. Table 3.2 highlights some key information to provide background on the schools.

Table 3.2

Overview of Two Schools in the Southeast United States

	Total number of teachers in school	Total enrollment of students	Percentage of inexperienced teachers	Teacher-to-student ratios	Percent of students living in poverty
School A	35	532	12.8	19.7 to 1	75.2%
School B	28	453	18.8	19.7 to 1	59.9%

The district is one-to-one with Chromebooks, so every student in each classroom of both schools has access to a computer and reliable internet. Students in K-6th grade are not allowed to take home these devices, so technology use is regulated only for the school day. With School A having three-fourths of their families living below the poverty line according to the S.C. School

Report Card (2024), the lack of devices and internet at home could be a potential barrier to school success. Both schools had excellent ratings on school climate and degree of happiness from parents (S.C. School Report Card, 2024). Table 3.3 shows this information and highlights the differences between the two schools.

Table 3.3

School Climate Information from the 2023-2024 SC School Report Card

	Total number of parent surveys returned	Percent satisfied with learning environment	Percent satisfied with social and physical environment	Percent satisfied with school-home relations
School A	84	92.4	93.3	91.4
School B	83	94.8	94.6	91.9

Both schools have female principals, one of whom is brand new as of July 2024. The first-year principal did serve the same school as assistant principal for the previous two years, and the other principal has been in the current role for six years. Low teacher turnover is also a key characteristic of both schools. High teacher satisfaction could be attributed to this low teacher turnover, with both schools having a satisfaction rating of over ninety percent (SC School Reports Card, 2024).

Study Participants

Participants for this study are teachers in their second year of teaching. Both second-year teachers completed their first year in the same district and same grade. Purposive sampling will be used to increase the effectiveness of this research. Participants will be selected based on their years of experience within the chosen schools, and this can be done best by using purposive

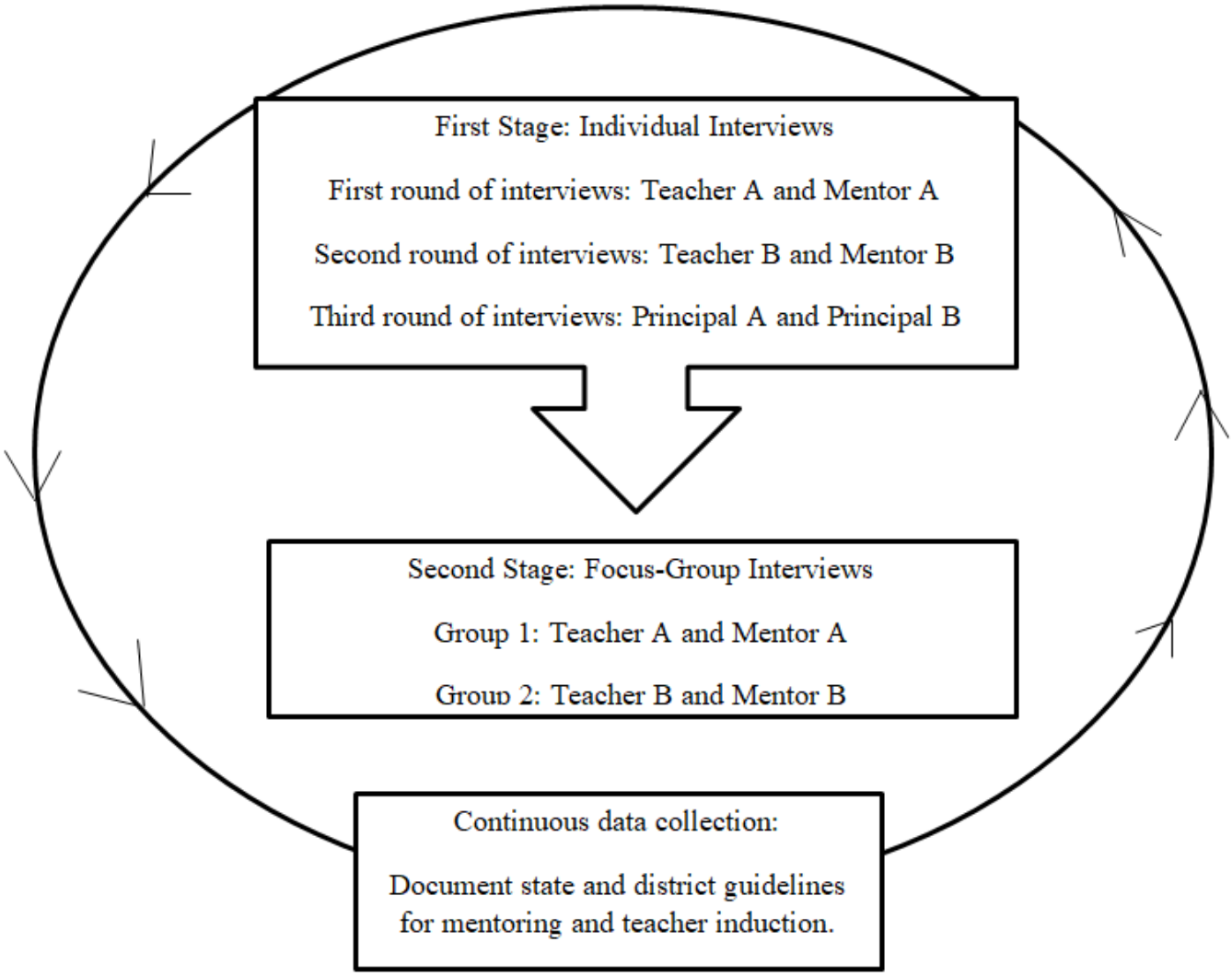
sampling (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). The study will include the mentor as well as the second-year teacher. Again, for purposive sampling, specific qualifications must be met, and that is based on the number of years of experience. Based on the research questions, a teacher with more than two years of experience is not eligible for this study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019).

Data Sources

The researcher will collect several types of data. Stake (1995) points out good case study research relies on discipline and thinking the research process through. Part of this is thinking about the best data sources available. For this study, data included a document review of relevant district data throughout the data collection period. Next, individual interviews took place with both teachers and mentors at both schools, and then principals from each school. After individual interviews were complete, focus-group interviews took place with the second-year teacher and mentor at School B and then the second-year teacher and mentor at School A. The variety of data will allow for a more complete picture of the mentoring process and the possibility of impact on the second-year teacher. Open-ended, individual interviews will allow the interviewees to construct their own realities, add depth to the answers, and the researcher will not just receive answers to specific questions (Yin, 2009). Figure 3.2 will show the types of data sources as well as the order the data collection will occur.

Figure 3.2

Order of Data Collection



Document Review

The document review is the first step of the data collection process. While this is the first step, documents continued to be analyzed as needed throughout the study to add clarity and depth. Documents from the state level about the requirements of continuous mentoring were reviewed and analyzed. Other documents utilized from the district about policies and procedures of mentoring were reviewed. Both types of documents help add contextual information to the

study and also caused some altering of the interview questions based on findings. Merriam (1998) states that keeping an open mind when looking for pertinent documents is important as well. This will help ensure that as much clarity and context as possible is provided for the research and data analysis.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are the primary data source for this research. Listening and recording from the second-year teachers, mentors, and principals will each give a specific layer of information that can be analyzed. The individual interviews were conducted using individual interview protocol created by the researcher specifically for this study. The questions were created to try to specifically answer the research questions without adding any individual opinions and were guided by the literature on mentoring. Merriam (1998) states that the semi-structured interview is mid-way between a highly structured interview and a completely open-ended discussion. While all three interview options can have positives and negatives, the semi-structured approach allows for specific questions to be asked about the impacts of having the same mentor for the first and second year but does allow for flexibility to see where the interview leads. Comparable interview questions were created for the second-year teacher (see Appendix A) and mentor (see Appendix B). The interview questions for the principal (see Appendix C) were focused on the mentoring role in the school and the impact seen from the perspective of the principal for having the same mentor for the second-year teacher.

Focus-Group Interviews

Focus-group interviews of the mentor and second-year teacher were used to make connections and develop an understanding of the relationship between the second-year teacher and the mentor. This data was collected based on the discussion and interactions. The focus-

group protocol (see Appendix D) will be administered with both cases at both schools through Zoom. Merriam (1998) posits there are many reasons to use focus groups and for this study, focus groups can be used to help develop an understanding of the relationship as well as to see first-hand the interactions between the participants.

Data Procedures

After receiving the school district approval for the study, the researcher contacted the two school principals within the district who have second-year teachers in their buildings. In particular, the researcher focused on second-year teachers with the same mentor as the previous year. This district spreadsheet of assigned mentors was previously shared with the researcher after a conversation about mentoring with the district human resource director. This resource was utilized to email principals to seek approval to work in their schools with the pre-determined second-year teachers and mentors. The emails were stored as consent to use the schools and interview participants in each building.

Individual Interview

Once principals approve the work to occur within their schools, the researcher approached the second-year teachers and mentors about participating in the study. An initial email was sent to the participants asking for a convenient meeting time. These initial meetings were conducted individually at the home schools to allow for an explanation of the study and establish rapport and trust. A consent form was supplied to each participant during the initial meetings to consent to the research process (see Appendix E). This consent form was administered during the first meeting after explaining the study. The participant consent form serves as the ethical agreement between the researcher and the participants during the research. The consent form included several important sections. One section of the consent form asked the

participants if the need arises for clarification, if the participants would answer follow-up questions through email or in person. The consent form also informed the participants that they could stop participating at any point during this process since this is voluntary research. Allowing participants to know that the researcher is thinking about their well-being and clearly explaining all parts of the research ahead of time through the consent form was an important piece of the research process. It is also important to know through this discussion of the consent form, participants had an explanation of the confidentiality protocols and were able to ask any clarifying questions.

With the confidentiality agreement, the protocols for saving data were also reviewed. While in person interviews can add depth, the researcher decided to utilize Zoom to record data. This will allow accurate transcription of the conversation. If the participants prefer in person, then the conversation will be recorded using a recording device and transcribed by the researcher. After the discussion of all of the protocols, the researcher scheduled times to conduct the individual interviews. The individuals planning to be included are the two second-year teachers, the two mentors, and the school principals with a specific pattern of interviews. The interviews occurred by school with Teacher B and Mentor B first and then interviewing Teacher A and Mentor A. The order of School A and School B was dictated by teacher schedules and availability. This interview pattern allowed the researcher to focus on patterns within each school before refocusing on the next school. Then the principals were the last two individuals interviewed. This pattern of semi-structured individual interviews will allow analysis to happen in an orderly fashion and for the interview questions to shift slightly as needed based on responses. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each individual using prewritten questions based on the research study (see Appendix A for second-year teacher;

Appendix B for the mentor; and Appendix C for the Principal). Using the semi-structured questions also helped alleviate any potential researcher bias by adding structure to the interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed for additional questions at the moment to determine the impact of the second year of mentoring.

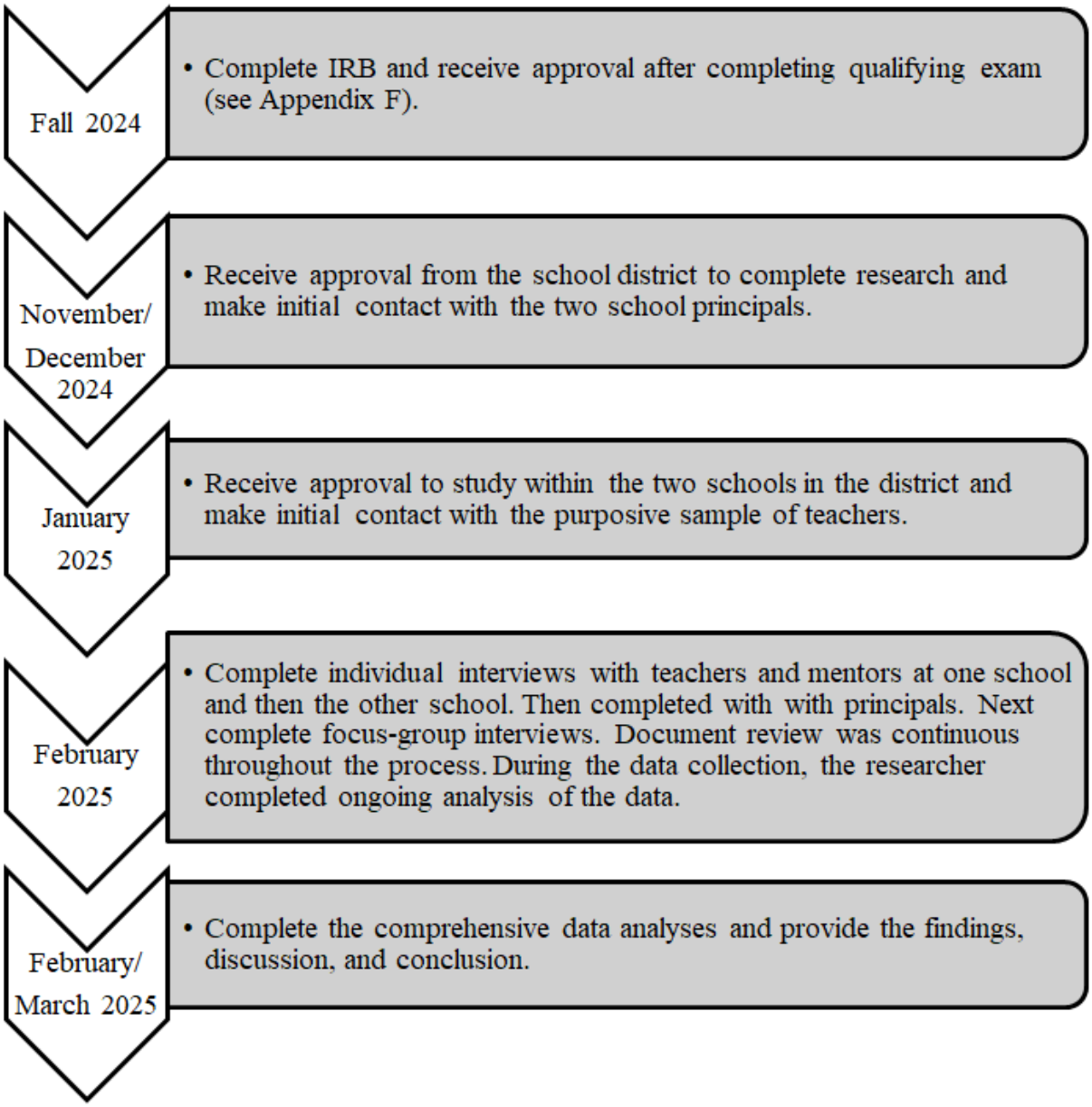
Focus-Group Interviews

After the semi-structured interviews were completed, the researcher requested a focus-group of Teacher B and Mentor B, and then Teacher A and Mentor A. The purpose of the focus group was to meet with each teacher and mentor together to review questions and to build from the individual interviews. Again, schedules dictated the order of schools for the focus-group interviews. Each pair was interviewed using the semi-structured interview questions in Appendix D. Before the interview commenced, the focus-group participants were reminded of their Informed Consent signatures and their rights to withdraw. A review of recording and confidentiality procedures were also verbally reviewed. Recordings were taken and became part of the research data. For School A, both participants were able to be in the same room and on the same Zoom screen. For School B, the participants were on Zoom at the same time with the researcher, but they were not able to be in the same room and shared a Zoom screen due to scheduling conflicts. While at each school, the individuals for the focus groups were able to be on camera at the same time, School A's participants being in close proximity versus School B's lack of close proximity needs to be noted. The research occurred at each participant's own school or other neutral locations where anonymity can be controlled. Outside meeting locations besides school or district locations were not used to control the variable of who sees the research taking place.

After data collection, the data was carefully stored to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Data is encrypted and stored on a password-protected device to prevent data breaches. All handwritten data will be stored in a lock box in the researcher's house to maintain the participants' anonymity as well. All of these protocols were put into place to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Data will be stored, both paper and electronic, for three years. All data will be shredded or deleted at the end of the three years. Figure 3.3 provides the data collection timeline during the research process.

Figure 3.3

Data Collection Timeline



Data Analysis Plan

Data collected for this research included data collection, semi-structured individual interviews with transcripts, and focus-group interviews. Using multiple data sources with a

strong focus on interviews helped create reliability and credibility for this study. Focusing specifically on interviews helped create trustworthiness within the study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). The interviews focused on the participants and the real-life experiences that they have encountered while being mentored. After each interview was transcribed, the transcript will be shared with each interviewee. The teacher, mentor, and principal were asked to use member checking to ensure the validity of the responses given. After the individual interviews, each transcript was reviewed and then sent to the individual interviewee for checking and verification. The additional layer of response checking by the individual being interviewed allowed for reflection and adjustments as needed and helped ensure the information is as accurate as possible. Individuals were given a week to check over the transcribed material to ensure the responses were correct.

This research does have threats to internal validity due to protocol creation and location. The data could vary based on school locations because mentoring during the second year and the district protocols created are not closely mandated by the district. This flexibility allowed by the district could cause some variation in each individual school location.

After the first teacher individual interview, the data analysis process started. The transcript was printed and shared with the participant. The participant had a week to complete the member-checking process. After the deadline, data analysis started. For this research, data analysis consisted of taking each transcript as it was completed and reading over it. From this initial reading, thoughts were organized and recorded in a notebook for the purpose of analysis. After the initial reading, the researcher used the research questions to focus on themes emerging from interviews and those will be recorded. After each individual interview, this process of reading, rereading, and recording notes, observations, and themes took place. After all, six

individual interviews were completed and initial data analysis had occurred, then the researcher started looking for broad categories or themes that emerged from the interviews. Merriam (1998) states "devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 179).

After the initial interviews, the focus-group interview for School A and School B occurred. There were two focus groups completed; one for the teacher at mentor at School A and one for the teacher and mentor at School B. While there were specific questions in Appendix D to ask the groups, the data analysis already occurring helped broaden the researcher's thinking and perspectives going into the interviews. The previous individual interviews also allowed the research to gather an understanding of personalities and relationships prior to the interviews.

Looking at both school cases and all of the data types helped create a complete picture of the case study research. Also, multiple data sources ensure triangulation within the data. These practices minimize the chances of misinterpretation by the researcher (Stake, 2006).

Credibility of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was specifically chosen for this research because of the desire to interview individuals and hear the perspectives from a mentor, second-year teacher, and principal. With this approach an awareness of reliability and validity still has to be kept in the forefront of the researcher's mind. Stake (1995) sees qualitative research as a means of gaining a detailed and deeper understanding of particular cases. Because gaining this deeper understanding can be subjective, there has to be intentionality in the integrity of the study.

Validity of the study is important because of accuracy of reporting matters. There are several methods to help ensure qualitative research is valid. One of the most used is triangulation

of data. Triangulation of data means using multiple sources or data points (Merriam, 1998). The process of triangulation allows for a holistic understanding to begin emerging about the data. For strong triangulation, there needs to be a clear description of the case. As much as possible needs to be described about the case for anyone else who might be observing it to see the same things (Stake, 1995). There also needs to be a clarity of reporting the data from the cases that includes even writing down information that already is known.

Another method to check for validity is member checks or taking the data back to the participants to make sure the information is correct. Member checking allows the participants to read over the rough drafts of notes to ensure accuracy of the material (Stake, 1995). This method helps ensure checking of the data throughout the research process to ensure the researcher is interpreting the data correctly and accurately. Member checks were conducted after each individual interview was completed as this allowed each interviewee to review the transcript.

Reliability is the ability to replicate the study and have the same results. With case study research, this can be difficult because the research deals with people in specific situations and human behaviors are dynamic (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2018) states clear documentation of the procedures used during the research study are key to ensuring the reliability of the study. Clear and explicit procedures allow for clarity in the design. The clarity helps maintain the reliability of the study and creates credibility by allowing others to replicate the study if desired.

Reliability and validity are key to creating credibility within qualitative research. Time and intentionality are needed throughout the research to ensure credibility is being maintained. The clear research protocols presented in chapter three will help maintain these goals.

Ethics and Confidentiality

The researcher worked to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data collection process. While in-person interviews were necessary, no names or identifiers will be associated with the recorded research. When the interview is recorded through Zoom or other recording device, then the recording was stored on a password-protected computer. The researcher ensured that the personal computer storing the information had an up-to-date virus software program so an outside source cannot breach information. Researcher notes were stored in a secure manner to ensure no information is released to others.

Utilizing informed consent ensures that participants know their role in the research and informs them of their right to withdraw at any time. The consent form helped create a level of trust between the participants and the researchers. If follow-up interviews were needed, verbal consent was required at the beginning of each interview to ensure that participants were still willing to participate. The consent form also informed participants that the data will be stored in confidentiality, and it will remain anonymous throughout the research. No coercion was used to require participants to participate in the research, and there will be no monetary compensation or other remuneration for participants.

While the researcher is an employee within the district, the research did not occur at the researcher's home school. The participants at the two schools used were aware of the researcher's employment, but the researcher used informed consent to ensure confidentiality and anonymity within the study. The researcher has nothing to gain from the research happening within the home district and foresaw no potential conflicts of interest.

Summary

This collective case study will provide an opportunity to gain experience about the potential impacts of second-year teachers in a rural Southern school district having the same mentor for the second year. The intent is to interview participants and note the impacts that all parties discussed through the interviews and other protocols. The methodology has been reviewed in chapter three and findings from the research will be shared in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study focused on the impacts of second-year teachers who have the same mentor for year two of their teaching career. The state of South Carolina only requires one year of teacher mentoring for novice teachers. The chosen district has made it a district initiative for the last decade to assign the same mentor for year one and year two of a novice teachers career. Two elementary schools within this same district were used to identify two pairs of mentors and second-year teachers who were intentionally chosen to be interviewed. These two pairs were the only two where consistency was kept from year one to year two with mentor and teacher assignments. These selected pairs were also each part of a focus-group interview that occurred after the individual interviews were completed. The focus group allowed for increased clarity of responses. The interviews ranged from thirty to forty-five minutes for each discussion. District and state documents were also reviewed to add depth and understanding to the study. The variety of data collected was used to triangulate the data based on the following research questions, *In an elementary school setting, how does a second year of teacher mentoring impact the second-year teacher?* Two guiding questions helped focus the research study:

- How does having the same mentor for two years impact the second-year teacher?
- What qualities of continuous teacher mentoring impact teachers?

Context

Starting at the state level specific requirements are required by districts in the State of South Carolina to become a mentor. Districts then must create a plan to follow the state requirements while also creating a plan that is best for the district. The state then must approve each district's plan for induction and mentoring for it to go into effect. For the document review, documents from both the state and district were reviewed. Documents clearly state explanations

and guidelines for selecting and training mentor teachers within each district. The district then provided documents that reviewed their plan that followed the state requirements for mentoring and induction.

State Mentoring Requirements

The newest state mentoring requirements and guidelines were implemented in 2017. With the 2017 Induction and Mentoring Guidelines (2017), specifications were written for each district to have an Induction and Mentor Coordinator. The coordinator is assigned with making sure all teachers interested in mentoring within the district meet the guidelines for mentoring before signing up to mentor new teachers. In the studied district, the coordinator is also tasked with assigning a mentor to novice teachers and second-year teachers. State guidelines also set stipulations for the coordinator's role in maintaining clear paperwork for the mentor-mentee relationship during the novice teacher's first year of teaching.

The district coordinator is not the only district staff responsible for ensuring state mentoring guidelines are followed. The school principals have a responsibility to ensure the match is in the best interest of the novice teacher. The biggest responsibility for the principal is to make sure the mentor does not have any evaluation requirements of the novice or second-year teacher (2017 Induction and Mentoring Guidelines, 2017). The principal also helps monitor and assure the match is a favorable one for the mentor and the novice teacher. These roles can help establish a good working relationship for the paired teachers.

District Mentoring Requirements

For a mentor to be selected in the district, the mentor had to either be asked by administration or the individual can request, with administrator approval, to be a mentor. Mentors then must go through the Center of Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement

(CERRA) to complete a three-day training to be a certified mentor in the state of South Carolina. After the completion of the training, the mentor is certified for five years. Every five years recertification must occur in order for the mentoring status to stay valid. The district coordinator then has the mentor in the pool of available mentors for the district.

The first-year mentoring partnership is established at the district level and novice teachers and mentors meet over the summer before the novice teachers first year of teaching. The first meeting is held at the district office by the district coordinator and while key deadlines and guidelines are reviewed during this first meeting, it is more of a time for the mentor and novice teacher to get to know each other. In many situations this is the first meeting between mentor and novice teacher. This explains the focus on getting to know each other prior to the start of the school year. In the district, once a mentor is assigned the partnership continues for the second-year.

During the novice teacher's first year, the mentor and novice teacher are required to complete six monthly records of assistance (Mentor Forms). The record of assistance has a variety of activities that can be completed each month including observations, reviewing lesson plans, professional development, or working through task-based issues (Record of Assistance, 2024). The mentor is responsible for submitting the form during the required six months to the district coordinator. The mentor is also required to complete a full observation in the fall and in the spring with the goal of formative feedback for the novice teacher. It is not meant to be evaluative of the novice teacher. These supports are put into place to help guide the novice teacher to a successful first year of teaching.

The novice teacher has to attend first year teacher meetings once a month throughout the school year; the mentor is invited to attend periodically through the school year as well to sit

with the novice teacher and learn alongside of them as well as to celebrate the successes. At the completion of the first year of teaching, the mentor celebrates with the novice teacher at a district dinner. The pairing then continues into year two. In looking at district requirements, there are no specific requirements for year two. On the district documentation, a second year of mentorship is listed as a mentor responsibility, but no requirements are listed in under that category (Mentor responsibilities). The mentor is also listed in the state Adept 4.0 system for second-year teachers as the assigned mentor for the teacher. With this assignment, there are still no evaluative requirements, and the mentor is meant to provide support for success and learning.

Bounded Units of Study

When analyzing data from the two schools in the study, several themes emerged across both schools. There were enough differences between the two schools that this section is divided by each school focusing primarily on the individual interviews. The focus groups supported the individual statements from the individual interviews; thus; the statements recorded during this data analysis come from the individual interviews. The themes will emerge and will then be discussed more in the cross-case analysis.

Case One: School A

In School A, the second-year teacher taught in third grade during her senior year of college in the same school she would then gain employment. While the assigned mentor and she were not well-acquainted, there was an awareness of each other due to proximity within the building. This proximity in the building allowed a familial knowledge of each other before the first assigned meeting in the summer prior to the start of the teacher's first year of teaching.

The path of both the teacher and the mentor in this school followed what could be considered a normal path into education. Teacher A completed her undergraduate degree from a

state accredited school and was a student teacher in the school in which she was hired. Teacher A student taught in third grade and was hired for fourth grade; thus, it even allowed her to be familiar with the students she was teaching in her first year. Mentor A has worked in the same school since her hiring thirty years prior. This is her last year, and she will be retiring at the end of the school year. She has taught in the same grade, 4th grade, for twenty-five of those years. While she has been in the same grade for an extended part of her career, she was still interested in learning from the partnerships, saying, "I wanted to see her for some fresh ideas, some things I could [tweak]" (Mentor A Interview). In the past, she has mentored other teachers and had experience with establishing mentoring relationships and meeting district expectations for the mentoring partnership.

Establishing the Mentoring Partnership

After hiring a new teacher, the district coordinator has to establish a mentor partnership. Principal A explained while the district coordinator established the partnership, the principals will look over the list prior to announcing to the teachers and mentors. Principal A stated:

> It's [like] a recommendation process. We recommend who we think would be appropriate in the role of being a mentor. Then the district coordinator does a lot of the pairings of mentors and mentees. She shares that with principals and assistant principals at our summer kickoff meetings that we have every year. Then we do have a say, if we see something in there that we think might not be the best first personality wise because we do know our teachers pretty well. She is open to that feedback. So, yes we have a say even though she does a lot of the pairing (Principal A Interview).

While the principals do not always know the strengths and weaknesses of the novice teacher, they do know the strengths and weaknesses of their current teachers. Principal A stated the grade level is not always the best option for the mentor:

> Personality to me is super important. [You] have to be willing to take on another person for two years and you have to be willing to pour into that person. You have to be willing to listen to your mentee just as you give advice. It is a two-way street. I think in a perfect world, you could have personality pairs and grade levels, but that does not happen to me. I think I'd rather have personality pairs over grade level pairs (Principal A Interview).

The novice teacher and mentor in School A were both in the same grade. It was a three-person team in Teacher A's first year and moved to a four-person team during the second-year. This change created some challenges from both the mentor's perspective and the teacher's perspective.

Mentoring Partnership

In year one, Teacher A taught mathematics and Mentor A taught science and social studies. Even though these are different subjects with different preparations needed, both had the same group of students. Mentor A talked about how [beneficial it was] to have the same students because being able to discuss behaviors, contact parents together, and plan as a team allowed more daily contact. The close working relationship, and sharing of students, also allowed opportunities for times outside of school to be together and get to know each other. Mentor A mentioned going to basketball games and archery tournaments together to watch their shared students compete (Mentor A Interview). She was able to get to know Teacher A's family through these other activities and continue creating a strong relationship. The strong relationship created over time inside the school as well as outside of the school created a great deal of mutual respect

for each other. Both Teacher A and Mentor A were quick to praise each other during the individual interviews and focus-group interview.

Year two created new obstacles, because a fourth teacher was added to the fourth-grade team. This led to the team to be split into two grade-level teams. Teacher A was now teaching mathematics and science with another teacher and Mentor A was teaching ELA and SS on the other team. This difference in subjects and students has created unique challenges this year, because not sharing the same kids or teaching the same subjects has removed some of the times where they would meet and discuss. Mentor A stated:

> We still both have the same planning period, so I'm able to walk in, but I feel like this year I'm more of Hey. How are you? Do you have anything you need help with? And usually, she says, "I'm good." A big difference is we don't share the same kids. So, it does make it difficult. I can still give her the same advice, but you know you get different groups of kids (Mentor A Interview).

This change in schedules has provided unique challenges this year. Mentor A said this is the first time in her career she has collaborated with teachers on a team, and they did not all share the same students. It creates different challenges for mentoring relationships.

For Teacher A, it has led to more of a reliance on her team teacher who teaches the same students and the teacher on the other fourth grade team who teaches the same subject. The support has switched from the more formal mentoring assignment to informal mentoring by those nearest to her. Informal mentoring tends to be more spontaneous; more friendship based and lasts over the course of several years (Kram, 1985).

Records of Assistance

The Records of Assistance is how the district coordinator ensures the mentor and novice teacher are meeting during the school year. It is a one-page handout with suggestions and ideas for what to discuss or do during the required monthly meetings. The Records of Assistance is required to be turned in six times during the school year by the mentor teacher.

When interviewing about the records of assistance completed during the first year, both teacher and mentor discussed how helpful it was to keep them on track. They would meet weekly in one classroom or the other, whichever was most convenient or straighter, and talk and go over an item off of the paperwork. While there were no set times, the meetings primarily happened during planning or after school. Both teacher and mentor shared they were both teachers who stayed late each day and often were the only teachers left on their hallways in the afternoon. This gave more opportunity for check-ins. Mentor A explained, "the record of assistance was really good, as teachers we get busy. I know we don't mean to, but that's part of the job. So, the record of assistance forced us to meet and focus on specific goals" (Mentor A Interview). This requirement from the district level gave a focus for this partnership and helped them continue to meet even during the busy times of the school year.

Summary of School A

The mentoring partnership between these two teachers has evolved over the two years. The first year was an easier transition because both teachers instructed the same students and conversations could revolve around those students and situations happening in the classrooms. The second year has been a different transition and while Mentor A still checks in, the relationship is not as focused as in the first year. Teacher A is relying more on her current teammate who instructs the same students or on the teacher on the other fourth grade team who

teaches the same subject. This switch has led to more informal mentoring in the second-year than formal mentoring by the assigned mentor.

The switch to more informal mentoring during Teacher A's second-year was a natural progression. She now knew the other teacher on her team very well and she was more familiar with the school. The proximity of her assigned mentor was still important, but reliance has shifted to those that can provide the most support for what she needs in year two.

Case Two: School B

The mentoring relationship in School B followed a different path. It is important to note that there is not a right or wrong mentoring path. Discussion will be provided at the end of this chapter about differences between the cases and the research methods.

Establishing the Mentoring Partnership

In School B, unbeknownst to the principal when hiring, the mentor teacher and novice teacher had known each other prior to the hiring of Teacher B. The teacher had known the mentor through church and family associations since she was a younger. Mentor B described the relationship by stating:

> We knew each other from church things. So, my brother-in-law was her pastor. The good thing is she felt comfortable right off the bat. We didn't' necessarily have to get to know each other on that personal level because we already knew each other that way. So, [that] was extra helpful right off the bat. She already felt comfortable [texting] me and different things like that. I think [it is] really important to have that relationship with your mentor to know that they can text you outside of school (Mentor B Interview).

Unlike School A, the meeting over the summer before the start of the school year was a reacquaintance and not a first-time meeting. Having knowledge of each other at the outside of

the mentoring relationship allowed the teacher and the mentor to jump right in to the mentoring relationship focusing on the roles within the school. There was much less getting to know you time needed.

Teacher B came into teaching as a change from her original career. She started in nursing and after a few years decided to change careers, noting,

> I worked in [a pediatric] emergency room and I did all the things in healthcare and then when my son was four in 2020 I went back to school. So, I switched gears and said, "I think I'm going to finally do what I think I'm meant to do" (Teacher B Interview).

She chose to start a local university and complete the adult studies program in education. There was a connection to education for her. Her mother had worked in schools, so Teacher B was familiar with what teaching is like and stated:

> I have always been at school over the summer. I have always been at school before the doors opened and after they were locked. I [always have been able] to see the behind the scenes, which [made] me more passionate about it (Teacher B Interview).

It was a fast-track program, so Teacher B was able to start her student teaching in 2022. Yet, it was not normal student teaching. She started in a different district with an internship contract instead of the more traditional path of student teaching. An internship certificate in South Carolina can be obtained for teachers who have completed all the prerequisites for the education degree, but have not student taught yet (Internship Certificate, 2022). This put her in a 4th grade classroom on her own as the teacher of record and with an assigned mentor. An internship certificate helps put a teacher in a classroom allowing for students to have a teacher when a position has not been filled by the school. This allows there to be a teacher of record in the classroom. A mentor is assigned in this process by the district. Teacher B was coming from a

background of nursing, completing a Master of Arts in Education (MAT) to obtain her teaching license and was given her own classroom as her first teaching experience.

The experience was not a positive one for her. The year was extremely difficult with students and behaviors and led to her applying in the current district after completion of the first year. She felt she had failed miserably and would not have been able to continue with success in the previous district. She stated:

> I struggled, severely struggled, like [struggling] to the point where I said, I will [not go] back to another teaching job at all. I failed miserably and I didn't know what to do. I did not know how to [plan the lesson]. I didn't know what to do. I taught fourth grade, and I taught all the subjects, and I had 25 kids (Teacher B Interview).

This led to her looking for jobs outside of that district and led to her coming to her current district. When coming into her first year of teaching in the new district, she still started as a first-year teacher going through induction and was assigned a mentor for the first and second year of her teaching career. Starting as an induction teacher is normal if coming from a different teaching environment or not having taught a full-year previously. Her mentor was chosen from a different grade but was right across the hallway from her classroom. The proximity to her team and the mentor both played a significant role in her first year at the current school. It is also important to note again that in this relationship, the teacher and mentor already knew each other. The relationship already established helped ease Teacher B into the new school and new grade level.

The assigned mentor for Teacher B was in 4th grade and had been in fourth grade for the previous four years. Before this year, most of Mentor B's experience was in early childhood. Mentor B student taught at her current school and was then hired to work at the school; thus, all

of her experience is within the same district and same school. She believes strongly in the mentoring process and has mentored several times before. The most recent mentoring relationship was being a current 4K teacher in the school a few years prior to mentoring the current teacher.

Mentoring Partnership

While the mentor and teacher already knew each other, they still met over the summer before the start of the school year and completed the getting to know you activities and the overview at the district office introductions. This is a requirement of all mentors and novice teachers. Teacher B explained

> When I found out that she was my mentor, it was like, okay, this is a familiar face, somebody who I know outside of school, somebody who I've known forever. So, it was easy to build a relationship with her because we already knew each other so well. But it was also…awkward because I taught her daughter last year. It made me nervous, but building the relationship was easy, she was very laid back and would always [come by] to help (Teacher B Interview).

This juxtaposition of knowing her mentor from outside of school, plus instructing her daughter for her first year at this school created a different environment for the mentoring partnership.

Many of the meetings during the novice teacher's first year were for the completion of the district requirements. They would meet weekly and complete the required paperwork, but it was normally quick check-ins. Teacher B also describes herself as extremely independent and this played into the mentoring relationship both the first year and through the current second year. A lot of times when asked if she needed anything she would just state she was good because nothing immediately came to mind. Her reliance on her team was the primary means of

mentoring in the first and second year. While the assigned mentor could assist with overall school information, the fifth-grade team provided all of the other necessary functions and supports.

Records of Assistance

While the records of assistance were completed during the first year, there were more quick check-ins and follow-ups than sitting down and having in-depth discussions. The difference in grade levels also created some challenges because content and students were hard to discuss. This led to Teacher B having more mentor-style conversations with her fifth-grade team than with the assigned mentor.

The mentor was beneficial for the general day-to-day school routines, the hidden parts of the school day that teachers can forget to explain such as the grade book or how things work such as field trips. Mentor B explained:

> As far as like things around our school, like teaching her the ins and outs of how we do fire drills or how we do this or that. All those things we call the hidden parts. Things in your school you don't really know until you're actually in there for a while. Those things are so hard to define and definitely needed your first year of mentoring (Mentor B Interview).

Teacher B said her mentor was especially helpful with those school-based items (Teacher B Interview). The close proximity was also beneficial because it allowed for quick check-ins in the hallway. Also, even trivial things such as bathroom breaks during the school day could be utilized with the proximity of the mentor and not having to bother anyone else. Those unimportant things made a stark difference.

Moving into year two, the quick check-ins continued, but there had been more reliance on Teacher B with her team. These informal mentoring situations are due to teaching the same grade, having the same group of students, and having the same planning time. Both Teacher B and Mentor B have kids as well and after schools can be a bit hectic so having the same planning time as the teachers in fifth grade provides more time to check in and talk. Teacher and mentor are both aware that the other person is always there, but reliance has shifted. This can be normal in mentoring partnerships across grade levels.

Summary of School B

The partnership in Case Study B, while different, is based on what Teacher B needed to be successful. There was more of a switch to informal mentors within the same grade. This can be a natural occurrence in mentoring partnerships across grades. Informal mentoring tends to have longer lasting outcomes because the partnership is more friendship based and more focused on long-term goals versus short-term goals or requirements (Ragins et al., 2000). Informal mentoring, while not assigned, can be effective for teachers. While the partnership was different, the relationship building was still important and necessary for the success of Teacher B. The proximity Mentor B had to Teacher B allowed for quick checks and assistance in the moment. The proximity also allowed for the ongoing relationship throughout the school year.

Cross-Case Analysis

While the process of mentors being assigned in each school by the district coordinator was the same, the outcomes of the pairings were different. The backgrounds of both teachers when hired were different and led to different experiences throughout the first year and into the second year. This is neither good nor bad, but true in any situation where you have a mentor being assigned to a first-year teacher. Unless the teacher has been in the building before and

interacted closely with the mentor, new relationships must be established. Clark and Byrnes (2012) noted that novice teachers indicated the most beneficial mentoring relationships included experienced teachers who were friendly and approachable and who shared effective instructional practices of collaboration and reflection. Mentoring relationships take time and effort on the part of both teachers and mentors. Both of the relationships discussed in the case studies have worked to establish relationships and follow the district requirements.

Teachers

A key difference in this study is the backgrounds of the teachers prior to coming into their current schools. Teacher A followed the traditional path and student taught at the same school at which she was hired. This allowed a familiarity with the school, teachers, and administration. Daily routines were already understood and some of the pressure of the mentoring process was negated by this familiarity.

Teacher B had a different path into education through her prior career in nursing. This switch to education, change in schools, and the lack of student teaching created some unique obstacles. While her mother did work in the district, she was not at the school that Teacher B was hired at during her first year. Each school has its own personality and methods of working on a daily basis even within the same district. Teacher B had to learn the daily routines, locations of places around the school, and all the ins and out that happen during the normal school day.

Again, neither path is bad, but simply different and these differences can impact the mentoring relationship. It is interesting to note that both teachers have ended up in similar situations in their second-year with not being on the same team as their mentor. This created some commonalities in the switch to more informal mentoring roles becoming more prominent in year two.

Mentors

Both mentors believed very strongly in the mentoring process. Mentor A specifically focused on the relationship piece of the mentoring process. If a strong relationship was not established then the pairing would not be as successful. Mentor A described the relationship as:

> Feeling appreciated and not just tolerated. I felt like she appreciated whatever I brought to her, and I hope she felt the same way. She [produced] all these fresh ideas and [they were] approachable. I think that's a quality too. I knew when I shared something with her, it was safe. She was not going to say, "Oh, really?" I knew that if she shared something, I was like ["Oh, thank you!]. It was [about being] coachable and having the mutual respect, the appreciation, and just being coachable (Mentor A Interview).

These were her key ideas on what made the relationship successful during the first year. While the second-year has been a shift without instructing the same students, many of those principles on sharing and approachability still hold true during the second-year.

Mentor B, who was not on the same team as Teacher B had some challenges that were not seen in the pairing at School A during the first year. The lack of the same content and kids led Teacher B to spend more time with her teammates on the same grade, but it also provided another opportunity for Mentor B to be helpful. Teacher B posited:

> I think that having somebody on your team you could go to would be very beneficial but having that outside kind of eye and ear where it's like, hey, I know this student might be stressful but look at it front this point of view or let's talk about it this way. It's [like] having a third opinion or having that outside point of view is helpful as well (Teacher B Interview).

This third opinion was a safe space outside of her fifth-grade team where she could vent and solve problems with her mentor. That is a benefit of not having the mentor on the same grade level team.

Principals

Both principals in the schools believe strongly in the mentoring process, yet they view their roles differently. Principal B explains:

> Especially with the first-year teachers I feel like it's my job to make sure that they know the ins and outs and they know procedures and routines and [such]. So, it's a lot of, I don't want to say handholding, because that's not the right word, but you have to [take] them in under your wing and build that relationship with them (Principal B Interview).

Even though her role is principal, she still sees the importance of coaching and guiding the new teachers along with the mentor.

Principal A takes more of a hands-off approach and puts the onus on her mentors to be the guiding force in the relationship. She explains:

> I'm very hands off and it's not because I do not want to know what's happening, but I think there needs to be that mentor-mentee confidentiality and I don't want to get in the middle of that. I also want them to be able to be adults and figure it out together and not have me as [an intermediary] in there. I try and have the attitude of we're all professionals in the building and I want them to have autonomy when it comes to what they need in their mentor role (Principal A Interview).

Both principals have different perspectives of their roles within the mentor and mentee relationship, yet their goal is the same. They want the relationship to be strong and a source of answers for the novice teacher.

It also helps that both principals do have a role in assigning mentors. While the district coordinator is the main starting point for creating the matches, the principals do get a say. When the principals know who is in their building and the personalities, it allows for more thoughtful and better planned matches to occur. Principal A stated she has not seen in bad matches in her building so far, but Principal B stated if they do occur, she will just assign an unofficial mentor to make sure the second-year teacher is getting everything they need out of the pairing. This willingness to monitor and adjust is a necessary skill for successful matches.

Table 4.1

Key Consensus for Research Themes

Research Themes	Data Consensus from School A and School B
Strong relationships	All individual interviews focused on the importance of building strong relationships and then using those relationships to strengthen their teaching through asking for guidance and help.
Proximity	Both teachers focused on the benefits of having close proximity to their mentors. This proximity allowed for quick meet ups and check-ins, which would not have as easily occurred if classrooms were not in close proximity.
Other Supports	During year two [and part of year one for Teacher B], other supports including instructional coaches became increasingly important to extend teacher knowledge. The other supports were specifically chosen by both to increase an area of their teaching life than needed guidance or assistance.

Summary

With this research, the first analysis looked across each case to analyze the pairing itself. Then, looking through the lens of each pairing of participants allows the researcher to summarize the differences between schools while also looking for similarities within relationships. From this point of view, the pairings discussed in this chapter led to several themes emerging through the research.

The most prominent theme that emerged from the data is the importance of the relationship when mentoring. Both cases focused on the importance of the relationship, and this clearly presented itself when looking across the individual interviews and focus-group interviews for both schools. The relationship is key to the success of the pairing. Even with the differences between the establishment of the relationships between School A and School B, both second-year teachers talked about the comfort and ease they felt in talking and checking in with their mentor from early on in the established pairing. This openness allowed for clear and open communication for both the teachers and mentors.

Proximity also emerged as a viable theme during the conversations. Both teachers and mentors were in close proximity to each other, either right next door or across the hall. This close proximity allowed for quick check-ins and conversations that would have been harder to have in further away in the building. Proximity was seen as important across all the data sources. The mentor coordinator for the district looked at grade level and proximity when assigning mentor roles and then the discussion of the importance of proximity was discussed in individual interviews and focus-group interviews.

The third theme to emerge is the importance of the other supports in the school. Both of the second-year teachers began reaching out to other supports in the school. While being on the

same grade was beneficial for School A, including it allowed for the same common planning time, Teacher A discussed using other resources in the second year that helped her with specific goals. Both teachers discussed the importance of using the mentors for assistance and guidance, but as needed, they learned to use other school resources. This natural progression of moving from assigned mentors to reaching for resources and more informal mentoring by others is a step towards independence in the classroom. This natural progression from formal to informal mentoring also shows a level of comfort was reached in the school because the teachers could reach outside the mentoring partnership to find resources they needed to be successful. Both teachers reached out to instructional coaches in the school for guidance as well as Teacher A talked specifically about reaching out to the same content teacher on the other fourth grade team for collaborative planning.

All three of these themes emerged from the data and are connected back to the research questions of the study. The influence of the same mentor for two years is a positive and was seen through the individual interviews and focus-group interviews. Both teachers and mentors spoke highly of each other throughout the entire process, and even when other supports were being explored by the teachers, the mentors celebrated this step and acknowledged others could be helpful. There was an understanding the mentor was always there, but the mentor could also not provide all of the needed guidance. Openness and willingness to do what is best for the second-year teachers was a strong trait of both mentors. As for the second-year teachers, the mentor was a constant support they knew was there and could be reached at any time. The ongoing support throughout year one and year two was a constant that was beneficial to all involved.

The findings of this study are discussed in chapter five. This discussion includes the theoretical implications as they relate to past literature. Implications are presented on a second-

year of teacher mentoring and the study limitations are discussed. Further research points are also discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This multiple case study took place in schools used as a bound study (Stake, 1995). Each bounded case within this research focused on one school with a second-year teacher, a mentor, and the principal. With this study there were two bounded cases within one school district. The cases were studied analyzed and then cross analyzed to determine themes and implications. The cases were analyzed focusing on the research question, *In an elementary school setting, how does a second year of teacher mentoring impact the second-year teacher?* Two guiding questions helped focus the research study:

- How does having the same mentor for two years impact the second-year teacher?
- What qualities of continuous teacher mentoring impact teachers?

Initially individual interviews were transcribed and then were sent to each individual for member checking. All individual interviewees were included in the member-checking process. Member checking allowed the participants to review their original transcript, if they chose, and make any comments or changes. No participant sent any responses back during the allotted time. After this process data analysis began. After analysis of each individual interview, it became necessary to analyze as a school and then complete a cross-case analysis between schools. The analysis as a school before comparing across cases helped the researcher understand relationships and develop an idea of themes emerging from the individual interviews and then the focus-group interviews while also continuously participating in document review. The cross-case analysis used the individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and the documents reviewed to develop findings about the research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Each case was studied as an individual school and then cross-analyzed to look for patterns and potential impacts emerging from the data. The second-year teacher and the mentor went through individual interviews and then focus-group interviews to try to fully understand the data presented. The overall themes that emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and document review were the change from the first year of mentoring to the second year, a move in to more informal style mentoring, and a reliance on other supports around the school.

Second-Year Teachers Thoughts on Effectiveness of Mentoring

In education, mentoring programs have been implemented to increase teacher retention in schools. Mentoring programs have been around for decades and vary depending on the state, district, or school. The chosen district studied has a plan for the novice teachers to be mentored and then for the same mentor to continue into the novice teacher's second year. Curtis and Larsen (2024) explained that a clear match can serve as an effective means of emotional, social, and professional support for the novice teacher. Looking at the data from the research, both novice teachers praise their mentors for their support and check-ins. Teacher A stated:

> So all of the things that are required by the district to do as a first year teacher, all the meetings and the mentorship things that my mentor and I did…a lot of things were required, but I personally really enjoyed that because there was the accountability for me to make sure that I was reaching out to ask for help and not just making it all be my own problems. So, I thought that was a really strong start for me (Teacher A Interview).

Teacher B had a unique perspective than Teacher A, because her background was different coming into her first year of teaching. With her internship certificate during her official first year, she had been assigned a mentor. She said the mentor really "did nothing" (Teacher B

Interview). This history coming into her being hired in the current district gave her more of an understanding of what she needed from a mentor relationship. Teacher B explained:

> So, when I came to the current school, I was like a wounded child. That sounds terrible, but I didn't have the help that I needed before. I didn't have any kind of background on what to do. I hadn't been mentored. So, I came in and said, "I don't know what to do, help me." I let them know, I was a first-year teacher, but I'm not because I've done this before, but it was rough, and I legitimately [still have all of the questions] (Teacher B Interview).

She gives credit to her mentor for reaching out, checking in, and always taking the time to come over and touch base. Schwille (2008) looked at mentoring through the varied and broad lens of emotional support, pedagogical guidance, and understanding of the career of teaching and for Teacher B this variety of mentor roles was important. Teacher B needed a strong emotional support system moving into first year in this school after her introduction to education. In looking at both novice teachers, they were both supported their first year by strong mentors who provided support, check ins, and assistance. This strong relationship building with both School A and School B helped the teachers establish themselves in the school and gave a solid foundation to move into year two.

Moving into their second year, both teachers were still in the same grades and teaching the same subjects. Yet, for teacher A, her mentor was put on another fourth-grade team and they no longer shared with the same students. While they still had the same planning time, there was not as much in common during this school year. Desimone et al. (2014) explains a key to mentoring partnership successes is having the same planning, because it allows more time during the school day to talk and share any concerns. This shared time was still a positive for School A

for the mentoring partnership. For Teacher B, there was no change between her and her mentor, because her mentor was still on a different grade than her. This lack of shared planning time with the purpose of planning together affects the needs of the novice and second-year teacher. While Teacher A could still meet with her mentor during her planning time, there was not a goal for both of them to accomplish other than check ins for overall school goals.

Focusing specifically on the second-year with both teachers led to key differences for both of them in their mentoring partnerships. Both teachers expressed their conversations and mentoring occurred more from their grade level (or team for Teacher A) colleagues than their mentors. Informal mentoring is defined as happening by chance without any specific agenda or purposeful schedule (Bynum, 2005). This can be a natural progression in a school as friendships, grade levels, and alliances are established and often happening?? spontaneously (Ragins et al., 2000). Grade levels are the most usual places for informal mentoring to occur because the same subjects are usually taught, and the same students can be discussed. There is also the common planning time and grade level meetings that allow natural discussion time during the school day. This natural progression can help the teachers focus more on learning specific content or management strategies. The second-year differs from the first year because the first year can be seen as more survival and learning the ins and outs of how the school runs. Once those skills are learned, the teacher focus shifts to focusing more on content and the intricacies of teaching. Both second-year teachers expressed surprise in the shift from focusing on the formal mentoring partnership to a more informal role with fellow teachers. Neither teacher was actively looking for another mentor, but it occurred naturally based on what was needed to be successful. Teacher A informally joined with her co-teacher who teaches the same students as her, and the fellow mathematics teacher on the other fourth-grade team. Both of these people meet the needs for

where she is right now as a second-year teacher. For Teacher B, she is relying on her fifth-grade teammates for the informal mentoring, because of the same students and common planning. Establishing strong relationships during year one has led to both teachers understanding their areas of weakness and what they need to be successful. Again, the formal mentoring partnerships are still established and there are still check-ins, but the reliance on the mentor expertise is not as pronounced.

While there is not as much information on mentoring during the second year of teaching, there is emerging information focusing specifically on year two. Hobson and Ashby (2012) explain while a mentor during the first year of a teacher's career can alleviate some of the culture shock and help adjust to the job; removing the mentor role during year two can still create a reality aftershock. This real aftershock can play an influential role in whether a teacher stays or leaves. The current district studied is not removing the mentor, but the second-year teachers are adapting to their environments and finding the best resources to help guide them to success.

Proximity Versus Same Grade and Subject

Desimone et al. (2014) points out shared locations matter within the school and can improve the match qualities. Both teachers in this study were in close proximity to their mentors. Teacher A was right next door and Teacher B was across the hallway. This close proximity allowed quick check-ins and pop-ins during the school day. There are moments as teachers where you need to step out for a quick minute and having a mentor right there helps alleviate some of the stress of having to leave the classroom especially during the first year of teaching. A close mentor provides a built-in support.

Both teachers expressed gratitude that the mentor was close, but Teacher B quickly pointed out in the interview that she quickly learned to rely on her teammates because of the

common planning time and understanding of the students taught. Mentor B talked about how there are many parts of teaching that are universal such as behavior practices or teaching strategies independent of grade level taught, but then so much of what we do as teachers is truly subject specific (Mentor B Interview). Only so much guidance can be given if you have taught the specific subjects the teacher is teaching. Mentor B had never taught fifth grade science and social studies, so this presented a unique barrier especially later on in the novice teacher's first year. This is where other supports in the school, not including the grade level team, can become incredibly useful as well. So even close proximity is not always the best strategy to assist novice and second-year teachers, but it can definitely be a strong starting place for the relationship.

Other Supports

In a school, there are a multitude of resources available to teachers. It depends on each individual school as to how open the resources are shared or advertised. For the second-year teachers, they both mentioned a reliance on their coaches that build over time. While Teacher A does have a teammate in fourth grade for her second-year who also teaches mathematics and science, this was not the case for the first-year. For her first year she was the only mathematics teacher in the grade. This led to her reaching out to the instructional coach at the school. She said the instructional coach was incredibly beneficial to come in and help her and guide her to success in math (Teacher A Interview). This was especially true because the instructional coach had previously taught fourth grade mathematics. This easy access to a subject resource was helpful as she was navigating how to teach the content.

For Teacher B, it was a comparable situation in the first year. She was the only science and social studies teacher on the grade, so the instructional coach also became a resource for her to use with planning and implementing lessons. At School B, the principal also plays a role in

coaching. For this year, the principal has initiated coaching cycles, where each teacher will go through a coaching cycle with the instructional coach, reading coach, and Principal. These coaching cycles take place over the course of the whole school year, but this allows three different resources to be in the classroom at varied points during the year. This opportunity allows more informal type mentoring situations to occur around the school. Creating opportunities to work with others outside of their own grade or subject is beneficial. Many times, in teaching, teachers are considered to work in silos where limited contact is available, among others. The allowing others in the building to coach and guide opens up the teacher's classrooms to others who can help. Also, the teachers allow coaches to come in their classrooms and model and guide. This is important and shows the comfort with the school and those around them. This openness happened in the second-year for both teachers. During year one for Teacher A, she was able to observe her mentor and have her mentor observe her. This is incredibly beneficial and gave them many talking points, but during year two having someone else willing to come into her classroom and help guide her is important. Both teachers expressed gratitude and appreciation for having others who want to model for them. This cannot be said for all teachers, though and the willingness of these second-year teachers to learn from others must be noted.

Implications

Implications will be looked at through varied lens. This section will start with the connection to school leadership roles and then move into implications for second-year teachers. This section will end with a short section on mentor implications.

Theoretical Implications

When thinking about the implications within this study, it is important to think about the underpinning theoretical implications and in particular those associated with leadership. While

the primary leader of a school is seen as the principal, there are many other individuals within a school who can have a leadership role. For the second-year teacher the assigned mentor has a strong leadership role and an outcome in the success of the novice teacher. This focus on relationships is mentioned by Rost (1993), who describes the leader within the twenty-first-century leadership theory as one who emphasizes the relationships within an organization. The relationships matter. In the current study, both principals focused on the relationships. Principal A described herself as more hands-off with the mentor-novice teacher relationship because she wanted it to be a safe space. She also did not want either of them to feel she was mediating or infringing on their discussion (Principal A Interview). Principal B described herself as much more involved because she loves to coach. Her first-year teaching was hard, and she does not want anyone else to experience those hardships (Principal B Interview). She checks in with the novice teacher and makes sure they know the requirements of the daily school day. She makes sure her presence is seen around the building and interacts with both students and teachers often. Both principals have diverse ways of managing their relationships within the school and both have merit. The principal has to find the best method for themselves to collaborate with their staff on a daily basis.

This right method of building relationships fits into the theoretical limitations. Bolman and Deal state, “the right mixture of strategy roles, relationships and coordination is essential to collective performance” (p. 49). In a school, the collective performance of all involved benefits the growth of the students and teachers. The right mix of structural alignment and human resource potential within the school is important. With both of these schools only having one second-year teacher in each building, it does show that turnover is low. This low turnover also helps administrators know their teachers and establish the best relationships.

Implications for Administrators

The biggest implication for administrators is they need to clearly know their staff and the strengths and weaknesses of each individual. No one teacher in a building is strong in all areas and knowing who a novice teacher can turn to and provide guidance is key. This is also important each summer in the district where principals see who the new hires are assigned to for mentoring from the district coordinator. The novice teacher might not be as familiar to the principal, but the mentors should be, and this allows the best opportunity for strong matches to be obtained.

Another implication is the willingness of the district coordinator to listen and adjust partnerships is also a strength of the districts. The school district administration needs to trust the decisions of the school-level administration in each school to know the staff and to know who would be the best fit for mentor pairings within each school. The district being a smaller district of only six schools could allow for this more one-on-one involvement of the coordinator and principals.

Administrators also need to be aware of whether mentor and novice teachers are not on the same grade-level team, then time needs to be allotted for the pair to work together. Not having a mentor on the same team is not always a problem and it could be the best for many reasons; yet it should not be a requirement for the pair to have to meet before or after school on their own time because they do not have common planning. This openness to create opportunities to find time to work together also shows the novice teacher and mentor their time matters. They are valued members of the staff and should be treated as such. This time together also gives them a focused time to discuss how things are going and problem-solve issues beyond the quick check-ins that occur much more often.

During the school year, if a mentor pairing is not working out for the best of both involved, the administrator needs to be willing to adjust. Principal B mentioned if a pair was not in the best interest for the novice teacher during the first year or the second year, she would assign an unofficial mentor to take the role (Principal B Interview). This awareness that personalities can clash, and relationships are not always best is important and again comes from knowing the staff who work in the building. While assigning an unofficial mentor does not change anything on the district level, it does allow the novice or second-year teacher to have the needed support to be successful. Sometimes this also means support is needed from other individuals in the building. The opportunities to observe other teachers who are stronger in certain areas or the willingness to bring in a coach to help guide the novice teacher can be beneficial. This district has both instructional coaches and reading coaches at all of the elementary schools. Both teachers praised their instructional coaches for coming in and assisting. This open-door policy to allow coaches to work where needed is not prevalent in all schools. The principals play an influential role in ensuring the coaches are available to help their teachers.

Some novice teachers and even second-year teachers express worry over letting their principal know they are struggling or have questions. Just as it is important for the mentor to touch base often, the principal should play a role in checking in as well. Rost (1995) states leadership is an influential relationship between leaders and teachers, but this relationship has to be seen as open and welcoming. The principals can always seem busy or occupied so having an open-door policy or being seen around the building can be beneficial. The mentor can play a role as well in establishing these contacts as well during the year.

Implications for Second-Year Teachers

Moving into year two, the second-year teachers need to be able to begin advocating for themselves and their areas of need in the classroom. Teacher A demonstrated this ability to advocate for herself by reaching out to another math teacher in fourth grade. Teacher A, while confident in the basics from year one, was in need of new engagement ideas. She reached out to the other teacher, even though she was new to fourth grade this year, and asked for help. This advocacy and ability to speak up for what the teacher needed in the second year was highlighted in both interviews of Teacher A and Teacher B.

Second-year teachers who are assigned a mentor need to know the mentor might not be the continued best match moving into year two. It could be the best relationship, or the second-year teacher might need to branch out to form more informal mentoring roles amongst others. The mentor needs to be open to this and understand it is not judgment on their mentoring skills. The second-year teacher needs to be able to express what they need in the relationship and work to achieve their success.

Both teachers in this study spoke to the fact they were surprised by the lack of need for the assigned mentor this year (Teacher Interviews). It was not due to not getting along or a lack of caring, but they had evolved to need more specific guidance. Teacher A needed to collaborate with the person on her grade-level who instructed the same students and taught the same subject and Teacher B needed to work more with her same grade-level team.

This does not mean the mentor is not needed, but simply the roles have started to shift. Both the novice teacher and the mentor need to be able to accept the shift in relationships. The novice teacher in a school has different skills and goals than the second-year teacher who has already taught the material and is working in the same school. The novice teacher needs help

with all of the school basics and moves away from that assistance going into the second-year. That does not mean they do not need support, but it just changes.

Hobson and Ashby (2012) explain second-year teachers also need to go out and observe other teachers teaching. With the Records of Assistance requirements in the district during the first year, observations of the mentor and others are highly encouraged. The mentor is also expected to observe the novice teacher. Teacher A expressed how much she enjoyed observing her mentor because it showed her ways to modify what she was doing to meet the needs of her kids (Teacher A Interview). This observation requirement goes away in the second year, but it does not make it any less important. Observations are still an excellent way to learn from others no matter how many years' experience a teacher has.

Implications for Mentors

For mentors, the implications have to do with their openness and involvement in the novice and second-year teacher's school life. The mentor needs to have an open-door policy for the teacher in order to allow the novice or second-year teacher to pop in whenever there is a question or concern. If right then is not a suitable time, then a time needs to be made and set aside for the questions. When there is a sense of availability and an understanding that the mentor is there to answer the questions, it only benefits the pair as a whole. Both teachers in this study expressed they knew their mentor was there for them and they could go to them whenever they needed (Teacher Interviews). There was no stress or concern they were bothering the other person.

Feedback is also important. Kardos and Johnson (2010) specifically state that feedback is important to the novice teacher in order to grow in their teaching abilities. Other areas that teachers need feedback are in the daily life of a teacher including planning lessons, classroom

management, and other day-to-day assignments. These discussions and feedback can be key to a novice teacher's success. The mentor needs to have an understanding though that the role of mentor will change over the course of the year and into the second-year. This does not mean they are doing a bad job but can actually mean the opposite. If a second-year teacher is not reaching out as much, it could simply be because they are becoming more proficient at their job and developing more teacher efficacy.

The biggest shift for the mentor could be the shift from being the primary one the novice teacher reaches out to taking more of a backseat role as the teacher begins to find their way. The mentors need to know the move from primary contact for each novice teacher will shift over time as a novice teacher gains confidence and other resources within the school. Both mentors in this study do not have as prioritized roles in the second-year because the needs to of the second-year teachers have shifted. The mentor has to be in favor of the shift while also still assuring they are there if the second-year teacher needs them. It can be a balancing act for the mentor they are ensuring the second-year teacher has everything they need, while also allowing them to use the resources they need to be successful.

Limitations

In general, case-study research and qualitative research both have limitations needing to be discussed. Qualitative research can be subjective without clear protocols and procedures to follow throughout the study. Both case study research and qualitative research can be difficult to generalize to other populations because of the specific research subjects or context of the study. Clear protocols and clarity of the research procedures need to be documented throughout the study in order to help minimize these limitations.

With this study being a case with a limited number of participants in a small southeastern rural district, it can be hard to generalize the data. Both schools being in the same district had the same district coordinator assigning the matches. The assigning of a mentor to a novice teacher could have been limited by the mentor choices currently available at each school. For the researcher, only having two of the schools in the district that were available based on requirements for the partnership also limited options. Fortunately, both schools had similar demographics and student populations as reviewed in chapter three, but every school has its own climate and personality.

Another limitation is the researcher who worked in the same district being studied. While the researcher did not work at either school, some individuals were familiar due to being in a small district and having worked in the district for a number of years. When sitting down with the interviewees in person for the consent form, the researcher did state she was not interviewing them as a teacher in the district, but as a student at Anderson University.

A third limitation that could have occurred was less responses to certain questions over the basis of worrying about confidentiality. While it was stated when signing the consent forms and reiterated at the beginning of each Zoom interview, fear over confidentiality could have inhibited some responses. At one point, Mentor A caught herself and said, “I forgot you were recording” (Mentor A Interview). Even with reminders of confidentiality there can still be concerns.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was conducted because of the researchers interest in mentoring beyond year one. In many ways having a mentoring assigned for the first year has become common place and not as noticed in the schools. This led to a curiosity about the impacts of having the same mentor

for the second-year. While there are states nearby that do have mandates for more than one year of mentoring assignments, this state does not have those requirements. There is nothing in the state documents about continuing the ongoing mentorship assignments for more than one year. The fact the district studied has chosen to keep the same mentor for the first two years is an anomaly within the state. Because this is a small research study within just this one district, and this district only had two pairs of teachers at the elementary level who fit the requirements of the study, it does leave room for a larger study of second-year teachers.

Even with the limitations described above, there are important pieces that can be learned from this research. Mentors are needed for first year teachers, but more importantly mentors who are in close proximity to the novice teachers are important to the novice teacher's success. For the teachers in this study, the proximity during the first year gave support and allowed for those quick check-ins that can be important for day-to-day survival. It also prevented the mentors from getting too busy to check in. Mentor B expressed this sentiment in her interview that you can get busy and forget to check in unless you are close by or on the same team (Mentor B Interview) Many of her check-ins were after school when she was on the way to the copier because she had to walk right by her classroom (Mentor A Interview). When you have to continuously walk by the classroom of your novice teacher, there is a more visual reminder to stop in and talk about what is going on.

There also needs to be an understanding that mentors are needed during the second-year as well and can continue to provide a bridge into the school. The formal mentoring role will not be the same though and there could be a shift to more informal mentoring approaches. The switch to finding more informal mentors can mean the novice teacher is comfortable in the school and is willing to step out and find those who can help in areas the mentor might not be

able to help. This is growth and a mentor needs to be open to this growth. As teachers we need to find who can provide the assistance we need and ideally that would be with the assistance of the mentor to help guide to the resources that are most beneficial.

Conclusion

The emerging themes in this research establish a foundation for the benefits of second year teacher mentoring. Benefits include building stronger relationships, reaching out and finding informal mentors during year two who provide help and assistance, and an understanding there are others in the school who can also be resources. The on-going goal in education is to retain teachers. Effective use of mentors during year one and year two can provide the stability, relationships, and resources that need to be successful in the classroom.

Looking back at the research discussed in chapter two helps show the benefits of having a mentor during a novice teacher's first year of teaching. Research by Smith and Ingersoll (2004) show that teachers who are mentored early in their teacher career are more likely to stay in the profession. While only nine states currently have mentoring beyond year one of a novice teacher's career, there is starting to be more research available focusing specifically on a teacher's second year (Goldrick, 2016). This study specifically connects a teacher in the second year of teaching. In year two, this current study shows an almost natural progression from the novice teachers' reliance on the formal mentoring of the assigned mentor to a more informal mentoring role based on individual teacher needs. Informal mentoring tends to be more spontaneous; more friendship based and lasts over the course of several years (Kram, 1985). This natural progression of mentoring from formal to more informal mentoring roles during year one and year two happened in this research with both second-year teachers.

The themes from both teachers were able to emerge because of the use of the case study methodology. This research method allowed for individual interviews of mentors and second-year teacher who were able to tell their story of what mentoring was like for them. These on-going interview conversations provided information that was able to be analyzed in-depth. With each of the two bounded cases including the principal, it was interesting to hear the principal's point of view. This research shows that two principals can have vastly different views of their roles in mentoring but as long as the support is there for the teachers, the same outcomes for the mentoring pairs can occur (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Within each bound case, a focus-group interview of the teacher and mentor were included as well as a document review. The document review throughout the research helped give the why behind the state and district requirements and provide the structure of the mentoring roles in each school for the novice teacher's first year. The focus-group interview allowed the participants to be able to have a conversation about the mentoring roles with each other. The information gathered from the conversation, while based on what was stated in the individual interviews, helped build support for the emerging themes.

The discussion of the bounded cases in chapter four detailed the conversation of the individual interviews and focus-group conversations. This chapter provided the information in a logical manner and helped the themes begin to emerge from this study. While each bound case was unique and the teacher's individual stories that were shared were quite different, the same themes were able to be seen throughout both cases.

The themes emerging were explained in chapter five and focused on the importance of proximity, moving from formal mentoring in year one to more informal mentoring in year two, and the role of other school supports. These three themes were seen across both cases, and it is

interesting to note that these themes are all present in chapter two as helpful for novice teachers. This study also helped illustrate the importance of these themes in year two within this small southeastern rural district; thus, the findings do support present research for novice teachers.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Second-Year Teachers

1.) Describe your background before this year of teaching.

2.) Can you explain how the mentoring relationship was established? Was it re-established at the beginning of the second year?

3.) Are there district requirements that had to be met with the mentoring partnership during year 1 and then during year 2?

4.) Were there resources that were used in the mentoring relationship? (Books, scripted materials, etc.)

5.) Explain a normal monthly (another time period, if needed) mentoring meeting.

6.) Where did most meetings take place? How did that make you feel? Would a different meeting place have changed meetings? Did you ever have additional meetings or impromptu check-ins? Why?

7.)Now that you are in year 2, how have meetings changed? Do you still meet as often?

8.) Do you feel that having the same mentor in year 2 has impacted you personally or professionally?

9.) What traits or qualities of the mentor have been most beneficial to you during your teaching experience? Why?

10.) What role does your mentor play in your day-to-day teaching?

11.) Are there other ways that you think the mentor has impacted your teaching?

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Mentor Teachers

1.) Background: Describe your background before this year of teaching. Were you here in the same school and grade before this year? How many years of education do you have? Have you mentored before?

2.) Can you explain how the mentoring relationship was established? Was it re-established at the beginning of the second year?

3.) Are there district requirements that had to be met with the mentoring partnership?

4.) Were there resources that were used in the mentoring relationship? (Books, scripted materials, etc.) How were those materials selected?

5.) Can you explain normal meetings between you and the second-year teacher?

6.) Did you ever have additional meetings? Now that you are in year 2, how have meetings changed? Do you still meet as often?

7.) Has what you discussed during the second year become more specific? Can you give examples of the change in mentoring conversations over the two years?

8.) Has it helped your mentoring relationship this year now since the relationship is already established?

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Principals

1.) Please describe your background and experience in your current role.

2.) What role do you play in the mentoring process? Do you have a role in who is selected as mentors in your school?

3.) How many mentoring relationships have you seen or been a part of? How many have you seen that have the same mentor in the second year?

4.) What benefits/issues do you see with having the same mentor in the second year of a teacher's career?

5.) What other thoughts do you have about keeping a mentor for more than one year?

6.) When thinking about mentors in the schools are there specific teacher traits or personality traits you look specifically for? Why or why not?

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Focus-Group Interviews

1. Who initiated the monthly (or other time period) meetings?
2. Was there a designated leader in the meeting or did that change and evolve over time?
3. How did you determine what to discuss?
4. Have you had what you would consider impromptu meetings, or do you rely on the more structured meetings?
5. Do you think it is helpful to be on the same team with each other?

Appendix E

Informed Consent for Dissertation Research

ANDERSON
UNIVERSITY
Knowledge for your Journey

INFORMED CONSENT FOR
---Dissertation Research on Mentoring Impact with Second-Year Teachers ---

You are invited to participate in a research study to research the potential impact that having the same mentor for the second year has on a second-year teacher. This study poses no risk; however, you may be asked to answer personal questions about your mentoring relationship. Your data will be anonymously reported and will be kept confidential throughout.

This study is being conducted by Jennifer Eaton, Ed.D. student at Anderson University under the supervision of Dr. Jeremy Watts, Associate Dean of the College of Education. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a second-year teacher in the specific schools, you are the corresponding mentor of the second-year teacher, or you are the school principal.

If you decide to participate, I will interview you either in-person or through Zoom, depending on your preference and availability, and ask you questions about the mentoring partnership. There will be one initial interview that will last for approximately an hour and potentially follow-up questions that will take considerably less time. After the initial individual interviews, there will be a focus-group interview consisting of an interview with both second-year teacher and mentor from the same school.

Your participation in this study may involve potential risks or discomforts. These include discomfort over some question responses since you are discussing a relationship within the school. All information will be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous in the reporting process.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used to

fulfill an educational requirement of dissertation to obtain my doctorate. If presenting the information in a professional capacity, none of your identifiable information will be included.

Data will be kept confidential through assigned codes to represent participants and the information will be kept for two years and then destroyed. As a participant you have the right to withdraw participation at any time, without penalty, and you may withdraw any data which was collected about you if that data will in some way make you identifiable.

Your decision whether to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with [name redacted] or [name redacted].

If you have any questions, I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, please contact [name redacted] at either [phone number redacted] or [email redacted]. You can also reach [name redacted] at [email redacted] We would be happy to answer any questions that you have. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or e-mail at [name redacted], [email redacted].

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

_____	_____
Participant's signature Date	Investigator's signature Date
_____	_____
Print Name	Print Name

Appendix F

IRB Approval

ANDERSON UNIVERSITY
Knowledge for your Journey

Human Subjects Committee (HSC)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Dear Jennifer B Eaton,

Proposal Title: The Impacts a Second Year of Teacher Mentoring has on a Second Year Teacher

Submission date: Thursday, December 12, 2024, 11:45 AM

The Human Subjects Committee (HSC) has received and reviewed the submitted above-titled research proposal. I am happy to inform you that AU's IRB has voted to **APPROVE** your proposal as submitted. Your approval number is _____

Please be reminded that if at any point during the research, the risk level to any human subjects involved changes, either physical harm or loss of anonymity, or should you find it necessary to make any adjustments to the study as approved, please contact the HSC/IRB Chair in advance of implementing such changes. This may require that you submit an IRB Modification form.

We wish you well in your research.

If you need clarification regarding the committee's decision, please contact Dr. Gilbert Eyabi, IRB Chair, at HSC@andersonuniversity.edu or 864-231-2167.

Sincerely,

12/16/2024

316 Boulevard | Anderson, SC 29621 | 864.231.2000 | andersonuniversity.edu