

Beginning Teacher Support Model: Elementary Teachers' Resilience and Retention in Arizona

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Abstract:

In the United States, beginning teacher retention rates are extraordinarily low; only 50% of teachers remain in the classroom after five years. In particular, the state of Arizona has been recruiting significant numbers of teachers from out of state and attempting to retain them with minimal success. This persistent problem has led the neediest of students to have teachers with lower levels of experience, leaving those students with continually lower achievement gains. Drawing on integrated action research and grounded theory methodology, this study used a Creating Authentic Resilient Educators (C.A.R.E) model to support six new, out-of-state teachers in an elementary school district located in a high-poverty neighborhood in Arizona. In face-to-face group sessions and individual assignments, participants reflected on their experiences and examined multiple topics focused on persistence and resilience to reduce beginning teacher attrition. Participant responses showed that teachers must be nurtured and cared for in order to allow them to focus their time and energy on effectively caring for the students in their classrooms. Increasing support for new teachers has the potential to keep effective teachers in the classroom and improve the culture of teaching within schools.

Keywords:

Teacher retention, Teacher attrition, Elementary education, Teacher resiliency, Teacher support


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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, teacher retention is an ongoing and critical problem. Especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been decreased interest in remaining in the profession and increased retirement to avoid exposure to COVID-19 within the classroom (De La Rosa, 2020). “Currently in [the state of] Arizona, there are 1,800 vacancies and 47% of the vacancies are filled by teachers who do not meet the state’s standard certification requirements” (ASPAA, 2020, para. 2). Even prior to the 2020 school year, however, teachers were leaving the profession at alarming rates (Garcia and Weiss, 2019a; Kain, 2011). Evidence suggests that the number of years of teaching experience held by an educator may be positively related to student achievement (Burroughs et al., 2019; Hightower et al., 2011); thus, we need to keep experienced teachers in the classroom to ensure that all students succeed.

The importance of retaining out-of-state teachers in Arizona, the location of this study, is particularly noteworthy. The Arizona population has been growing in recent years due to an increase in job opportunities that has brought many new students to the state (Vanek, 2020). Unfortunately, the state has not been able to fill all of the teaching positions each year, especially since some Arizona-trained teachers leave to go to other states (ASPAA, 2015, 2020). Out-of-state recruitment of teachers has become necessary. While out-of-state teachers bring a richness to the culture of classrooms, offering new perspectives, experiences, and diversity, there are many unique challenges that come with being an out-of-state teacher. Teachers who have moved are navigating new lives in an unfamiliar location, along with new job experiences and responsibilities, and frequently experience loneliness as a result of leaving their friends and family behind (Author 1, 2015).

This nuanced group of out-of-state beginning teachers is not readily identified in the literature, yet districts around the United States recruit from out of their state and are affected by the complicating factors that this group may experience. This study, though small and local to an Arizona district, has lessons and strategies that may be applicable across the United States.

Effects of Teacher Attrition

Teacher retention is a fiscally staggering and professionally draining issue. In fact, the cost of teacher attrition in the United States is approximately \$7.3 billion a year (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Hallam et al., 2012). Teacher attrition is more than just a fiscal issue, though; it impacts the learning of students, infects teacher morale, and rattles the trust of the community (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Ingersoll, 2002; Stockard, 2004). The teacher attrition problem is largest in schools that have higher populations of students who are minorities,

living in poverty, and/or struggling academically (Burroughs et al., 2019; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007; Earley & Ross, 2006; Garcia & Weiss, 2019a); in these schools, teacher turnover is fully 50% higher (Ingersoll, 2002). Research further indicates that student learning is also directly affected by the experience level of the teacher: the lesser the experience, the lesser the level of student academic growth (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; P. Watkins, 2003). Therefore, we see that the neediest of students tend to have teachers with lower levels of experience, leaving those students with continually lower achievement gains.

In particular, teachers are leaving their profession during the initial years of their careers rather than persevering through those first years. Beginning teachers have been leaving the field at alarming rates, with nearly 30% leaving within the first three years of teaching (Fisher, 2011; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). Experts on this issue state that the problem in schools today is twofold: (1) attrition from those leaving the teaching profession, and (2) migration from those moving to teaching jobs at other types of schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

The impact of beginning teacher attrition on schools is significant. When employees work together as closely as teachers do, high turnover rates begin to affect morale and the development of relationships between coworkers, and the sense of community that is important to the success of a school begins to diminish (Joiner & Edwards, 2008). In many places, this creates a ripple effect of lack of morale and community that perpetuates more attrition. Administrators spend time reviewing procedures and policies rather than focusing on and recruiting new teachers (Bland et al., 2016; Watkins, 2016). Veteran teachers get overwhelmed with the additional expectations placed on them due to the inexperience of their newer colleagues (Ozder, 2011). At the end of the school year, many beginning teachers leave, forcing the cycle to repeat (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Morale crumbles, the teachers who remain become less willing to connect with new hires, and an ambivalence to the beginning teachers' plight emerges (Buchanan et al., 2013). Rollins (2008) notes that the school climate perpetuates a sink-or-swim mentality that continues year after year. New teachers, still constructing their professional identities, are greatly impacted by this negative climate (Smethern, 2007), which then perpetuates continuous staff turnover.

Administrators struggle with teacher turnover as well. It has been a challenge for principals to establish a productive and consistent culture while constantly interrupted by high turnover (Hallam et al., 2012; Watkins, 2016). Administrators are often unaware or uncertain of how to support new teachers or manage the reasons that cause teachers to abandon their posts (Esch, 2010; Hallam et al., 2012; McNulty & Fox, 2010; Schlichte et al., 2005; Watkins, 2016). With the intensity of the initiatives in schools today, administrators are not able to focus on altering climates and cultures to positively influence retention (Walsh et al., 2011; Watkins, 2016; WestEd, 2005). Joiner and Edwards (2008) suggest that the first step is to assess why teachers are leaving (before they can be encouraged to stay),

yet district and school administrators remain unaware of why new teachers are leaving and do not understand why those who do stay choose to remain (Barnes, 2017; Watkins, 2016).

Efforts to Improve Teacher Retention

Across the nation, schools and districts have worked to maximize beginning teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Turner, 2009). Some of the most common methods have included developing mentoring programs (assigning a colleague to a new teacher), formal professional development (sessions designed to enhance classroom performance or introduce strategies), and induction programs (intentional support sessions targeting new teacher needs, typically offered when beginning teachers first arrive). In Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) study of induction and mentoring programs, it was found that, while there was a relationship between beginning teachers receiving support and a higher retention rate, the strength of that relationship depended on the type of support and the number of supports received.

Support models have varied greatly across the nation for these novice teachers, and even internationally there has been a newer body of literature exploring methods and ideas for increasing retention. One support method that has been commonly used by districts is beginning teacher induction the day before the school year starts. One-day inductions provide new teachers with a common experience and sometimes increased connectivity with their beginning teacher peers. The typical objectives of this induction include personal skill development, socialization into the profession, an assessment of teaching effectiveness, and support in modifying practices or strategies (Martin, 2011). One-day sessions, however, may not be as impactful as ongoing induction opportunities (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019; Wechsler et al., 2010). Induction that also includes professional collaboration and a focused, site-based socialization has been shown to increase beginning teacher retention (Gossom, 2004; Martin, 2011; Schlichte et al., 2005). Professional collaboration also enhances teacher job satisfaction (Devos et al., 2012; Mansfield & Beltman, 2019; Martin, 2011; Schlichte et al., 2005). Districts with rich induction systems in place have noted a positive impact on the retention of beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Mansfield & Beltman, 2019; Turner, 2009).

Other factors that have impacted the success of beginning teacher retention are a focus on the culture and climate of the school site and leadership by the principal in establishing a nurturing environment where new teachers feel supported and appreciated (TNTP, 2012; Turner, 2009; A. Watkins, 2016). This staff and administrative connectivity is especially critical when teachers are joining a staff without additional, non-school-related supports in the form of family or friends. As Joiner and Edwards (2008) note, "If the climate and the culture of a school building do not support the induction activities of mentoring, collaborating and growing professionally, then new teachers will not be successfully socialized into the school organization" (p. 5).

Context of the Study

Arizona has been recruiting significant numbers of teachers from out of state and attempting to retain them. Given the increased challenges of being an out-of-state beginning teacher and the importance of this group for teacher retention in Arizona, this study's purpose was to explore potential methods for supporting those teachers and increasing their retention.

The targeted school district was consumed with a beginning teacher retention crisis. This retention crisis sparked attention from the community, school board, and administration, prompting them to further explore the factors that contributed to beginning teacher retention. This district, as well as neighboring districts, continued to try to find the magic formula to decrease teacher attrition through induction programs, coaching positions, and other creative support networks. Programming and curricular decisions for supporting and retaining new teachers continued to be developed and altered without any targeted data collection to monitor their effectiveness. The 2010-11 school district report submitted to the Arizona Department of Education captured the challenge from three years prior, when the attrition rate rose to 88%, noting the district's continued struggle with data on specific reasons why teachers leave because of the lack of participation on the exit survey. Exit interviews were the common method used to determine why beginning teachers who had resigned were leaving, yet this practice seemed to be underutilized and underanalyzed. Given these conditions, exploring the reasons why beginning teachers leave the profession and developing an intervention to improve beginning teacher retention were critical.

As a result, we created a program of informal support sessions for first-year, out-of-state teachers, to explore the effects on both retention and teacher attitude over the course of participants' first semester of teaching. The sessions were led by a district administrator; focused on personal and professional skills of everyday resiliency, including stress management, coping skills, and awareness of support structures (including their colleagues, administrative staff, district personnel, new friends, etc.); and were grounded in research about the needs of beginning teachers (Moir, 2011). The ultimate goal was to understand how such support might alter a beginning teacher's perceptions of their own persistence and resilience in dealing with the challenges of first-year teaching, thereby reducing beginning teacher attrition. Within the literature, there were no specific resources for how to customize support for out-of-state beginning teachers. Individual interviews we conducted with previous out-of-state beginning teachers prior to this study suggested that the following topics needed to be addressed: emotional support, feelings of isolation, and personal coping strategies. This led to the creation of a support program called the Creating Authentic Resilient Educators (C.A.R.E.) model.

The C.A.R.E. model (see Figure 1) was composed of key considerations for districts and sites when creating an innovative support plan for out-of-state beginning teachers. The overlapping concentric circles indicate the importance of each factor in the model. Both

district- and site-level support for and commitment to the retention of beginning teachers was considered crucial. The C.A.R.E. model required an informal setting in which a skillful facilitator met face to face with participants. The sessions themselves focused on developing personal skills, including self-efficacy, acknowledging work/life balance with stress management, increasing confidence, and developing self-advocacy skills. The central focus of this support was resiliency. Digital narratives and reflection opportunities were also an essential component of the model, to provide participants with a purposeful reflection on their face-to-face session experiences.



Figure 1: Out-of-State Beginning Teacher Support Model – A Community of C.A.R.E.

METHODS

We used an integrated action research (Herr & Anderson, 2014) and grounded theory methodology (Cresswell, 2009) for this 15-week study. Data were gathered from interviews, questionnaires, journal reflections, and mapping activities. We also had a significant focus on using innovative techniques to capture participant experiences through visual means, including drawing maps in face-to-face sessions and creating reflections using digital images on iPads. In this study, visuals allowed each participant to tell their story through multiple data sources and to reflect on how the support sessions were valued.

Setting

The study took place in an elementary school district situated in a high-poverty neighborhood in Arizona. The district consisted of seven K-8 schools, one alternative placement school, and one 5-8 school and served approximately 5,600 students. The student

population of the district was considered high poverty, and all schools were designated Title 1. Roughly 13% of the students qualified for special education services, and 11% were identified as English Language Learner students. The district was given a C rating by the Arizona Department of Education, with one school given an F.

In the three years before this study, the district lost two-thirds of its staff to other districts, retirement, moving, or leaving the profession altogether. As a result, the district conducted out-of-state recruiting. In the 2012-13 school year, 54 beginning teachers were hired, with 19 of them arriving from out of state. Of that group, 36% of the beginning teachers resigned, and of that group, 63% were from out of state. In 2013-14, 98 beginning teachers were hired, of whom 33 were from out of state, and 42% of those beginning teachers resigned. In the 2014-15 school year, there were 25 beginning teachers hired, of whom 6 were from out of state. This study's intervention supported those six out-of-state beginning teachers.

Participants

The participants in this study were new to the state, new to teaching, and not alternatively certified within the district. The district's Human Resources office initially identified these teachers as meeting the criteria of having zero years of experience in a classroom and having lived in Arizona less than three months. The six participants were all hired and began induction in July, when they were presented with the opportunity to be part of the study. None of the eligible teachers declined participation, and all completed informed consent to participate in the study. These teachers represented kindergarten through eighth grade and taught in five of the district's nine schools. Teacher names were changed to code letters to maintain confidentiality. Table 1 provides a complete list of the demographic information about each participant.

Table 1: Teacher Demographics

Identifier	Gender	Age (years)	Teaching Assignment	School Description	Housing	Previous Moving Experience	Previous Residence (Region of the United States)
Teacher A	Female	22	Primary (K-2)	47% Free & Reduced	Apartment with roommate	Yes	Plains State
Teacher B	Female	25	Primary (K-2)	63% Free & Reduced	House with significant other	No	Eastern State
Teacher C	Female	24	Intermediate (3-5)	66% Free & Reduced	House alone & then later with family	No	Western State
Teacher D	Female	27	Special Area (3 schools)	71% Free & Reduced, 66% Free & Reduced, 96% Free & Reduced	Apartment with significant other	Yes	Midwest State
Teacher E	Female	28	Intermediate (3-5)	98% Free & Reduced	Apartment with roommate	No	Midwest State
Teacher F	Female	26	Special Education	96% Free & Reduced	Apartment, alone and later with roommate	Yes	Western State

Intervention

Each monthly professional learning session was customized to the emerging needs of the group and followed the phases of new teacher research as designed by Ellen Moir (2011). These monthly interactive sessions were typically three and a half hours long and provided intentional modeling of multiple identified instructional strategies, along with time for teacher sharing and self-reflection. In addition, monthly email updates about the content explored during the sessions were provided to the administrators at the district and school sites, as well as the master and mentor teachers (instructional coaches who are evaluators).

The 15-week intervention took place during the fall semester, and each participant was provided with release time (using a substitute teacher) to attend the support sessions. There were five face-to-face support sessions with 13 at-home reflection assignments. The concepts around these sessions focused on generating an awareness of the beginning teacher's feelings about their work, self, and fit within the new community of their school and the state. The lead researcher was an administrator within the district who facilitated all of the face-to-face support sessions, where participants completed session mapping activities. A second recorder was also present at the sessions; this individual did not

participate but did take notes on reactions and body language and shared those with the researcher.

Participants were given paper, markers, and crayons in each session, with directions to represent their responses to researcher prompts visually on the paper. The prompts connected with the concepts being discussed in the sessions, such as, “Represent your support structures. Who provides you with support? Whom do you rely on to help you be successful as a beginning teacher?” Participants then shared their visuals with the group. Participants were also provided with an iPad to complete digital journal reflections. These related reflection assignments provided participants with a platform to apply the strategies, concepts, and ideas discussed in the support sessions by digitally creating or capturing their understandings.

Measures

The following four measures recorded changes in participants’ perceptions, experiences, and retention as a result of the intervention.

Measure 1: Session mapping activities.

Mapping activities were used to explore the needs, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of participants, as well as to examine how their journeys aligned with Moir’s (2011) phases of first-year teaching: Anticipation, Survival, Disillusionment, Rejuvenation, and Reflection. During each face-to-face session, participants were given a chart of the five phases and asked to place a sticker on the phase in which they perceived themselves to be at that point in time (see Figure 2). Participants then shared what was happening that had impacted their current choice of phase (see Figure 3). These stickers allowed participants to track their changes in attitude over the five sessions.



Figure 2: Teacher C Attitude toward Teaching Chart

Measure 2: Pre- and post-intervention questionnaire.

To explore the needs, perceptions, and feelings of participants, they were asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the intervention (see Table 2). The questionnaire explored what participants found valuable about the support sessions, including reflecting on their personal resiliency growth. The questionnaire included eight open-ended questions about participants' resiliency and the five phases of first-year teaching, as well as 15 Likert-scale items organized into four constructs (resiliency-emotional, social, motivational, and self-efficacy). A sample open-ended question was, "Describe what skills and traits you think will be important to succeed as a beginning teacher." A sample Likert-scale item was, "I am aware of my personal stress levels. Choose: Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree."

Table 2: Questionnaire

Open-Ended Items Examples:
Pre: What do you anticipate your first 15 weeks will be like as a beginning teacher? Post: What were your first 15 weeks like?
Pre: Describe the phases you believe you will experience over the course of your first year. Post: How was your experience the same or different from the phases?
Pre: Tell me about your biggest supporters. Post: Tell me about the support structure you now have. Tell me about your biggest supporters. Have these changed since the support sessions began?
Pre: Resiliency is defined as the ability to bounce back from challenges. It has been noted in the beginning teacher research to be a skill set that is critically important that can be enhanced and developed in a teacher. Describe how resiliency currently plays a role in your professional life. Post: How do you see resiliency as a part of your professional life now (if there was a change)? Did the support sessions influence this change?
Likert Inventory Items Examples:
1. I am aware of my personal stress levels. 2. I am aware of how I respond when I get stressed. 7. I consider myself to be persistent (stick with it) when faced with challenges. 8. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge. 12. I have a network of emotional support. 13. I build relationships easily.

Measure 3: Digital reflections.

Each week, participants used their iPads to respond to prompts asking them to reflect upon and capture their first semester of teaching. The prompts aligned with the most recent face-to-face session's strategies, concepts, and ideas and were focused on exploring, developing, and enhancing resiliency skills and how that work might change self-perceptions. A sample prompt was, "What best represents your month's experience in Arizona?"

Participants were asked to take or find photos that represented their needs, perceptions, or feelings and respond to the prompt with words to explain their image selection (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Example of Digital Reflection Regarding Resiliency

Many of the participants used multiple images, combining photos they took themselves with online images or quotes. The purpose of the pictures was to provide an example of what the beginning teacher was focused on or something that reflected their week. Many reflections resembled collages. These digital reflections were created nine times, in weeks 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 14. The reflections were also shared at the face-to-face support sessions. At the end of the intervention, participants combined their reflections to create a final digital story representing their 15-week journey, which they shared at the final face-to-face session.

Measure 4: Post-intervention interviews.

In the last two weeks of the intervention, the lead researcher conducted 40-minute semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with all participants. There were 10 primary open-ended questions asked in the interviews, along with follow-up probing questions. A sample question was, "Describe how the support sessions impacted your first 15 weeks of teaching."

Data Analysis

The pre-and post-intervention questionnaire, session mapping activities, and digital reflections provided multiple sources of data to determine what changes occurred and what insights were gained by participants during the first 15 weeks of the school year. All of these sources generated qualitative data that were analyzed and explored for recurring themes using a grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2009). As initial codes emerged from the data using open coding, categories that aligned with the theoretical models using axial coding were represented through supporting quotations. The goal was to extract understanding from the interconnectedness of these codes and data. Inter-rater reliability in coding was established via another researcher reviewing 30% of the data, with a 95% inter-rater agreement (Creswell, 2009).

RESULTS

Through the creation of the C.A.R.E. model, the experiences of beginning teachers throughout their first semester were examined in relation to (1) the normative map of a teacher's journey, (2) participant resiliency and weekly experiences, and (3) participant impressions of the intervention.

Normative Mapping

After participants read Moir's (2011) article about the five phases experienced by first-year teachers, they indicated during each face-to-face session where they perceived themselves to be in those phases. Each phase was assigned a number (10=Anticipation, 9=Reflection, 8=Survival, 7=Rejuvenation, 6-1=Disillusionment) to chart participant responses together. This information was then plotted onto a graph, with each participant in a separate color to show their experiences as compared to the trend line based on the research (Moir, 2011) (see Figure 4).

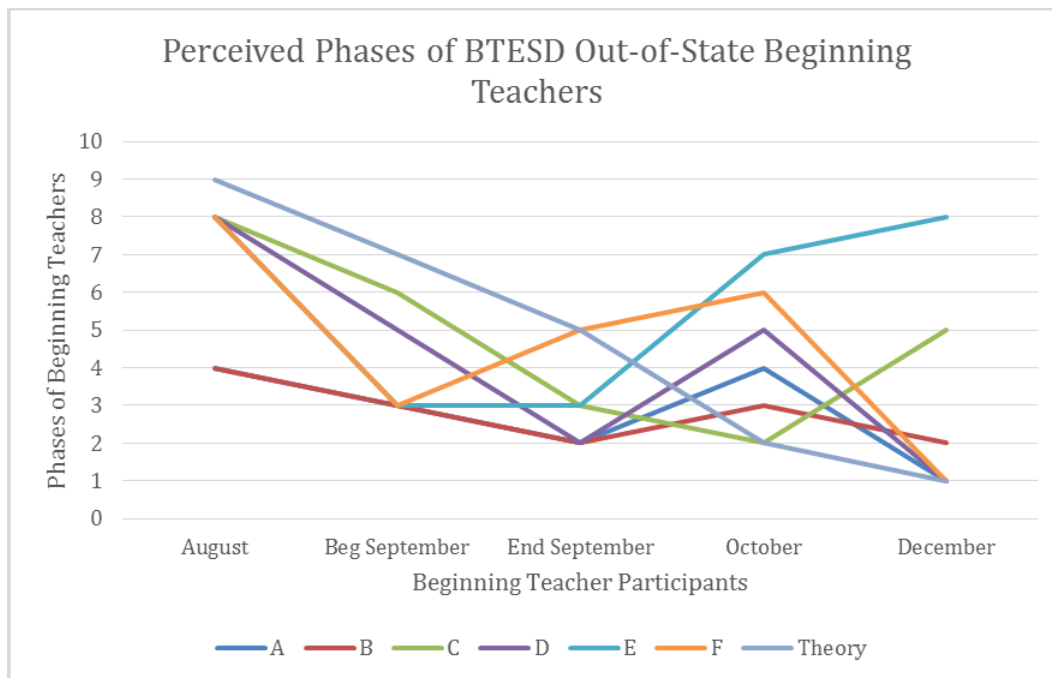


Figure 4: Tracking Participant Phases of Teaching

In comparing Moir's (2011) research with participants' responses, it is evident that participants did not follow the exact theory line. According to participants' explanations for their choices, they chose their phases based on what was happening in both their personal and their professional lives. If participants were experiencing personal crises, they indicated greater challenges in their professional attitudes. For example, Teacher B started the year feeling overwhelmed and in the Survival phase, rather than in the expected Anticipation phase, due to the shock of moving and challenges with her living arrangements. She then slid immediately into Disillusionment, faster than the theoretical model would have suggested.

In addition to the mapping activity, participants' digital reflections were used to confirm their phase selections. There was considerable overlap between mapping responses and digital reflections, which highlighted that participants were consistent in the way they responded to each activity. For example, Participant F's December selection of an overwhelmed and crazy cartoon character confirmed her face-to-face session indication that she was in Disillusionment (see Figure 5).

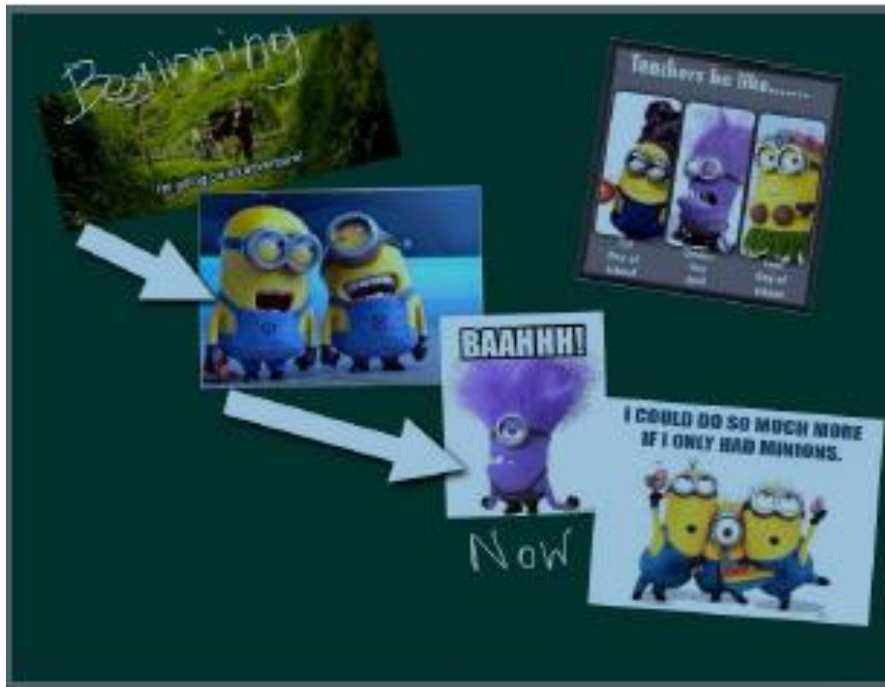


Figure 5: Teacher F Reflection

Participant Experiences

The resiliency, feelings, and experiences of participants across these 15 weeks were assessed with participant journal reflections, the pre- and post-intervention questionnaire, and individual interviews. It was evident that participants in this study were overwhelmed for most of their first semester. For example, the words that appeared most frequently in the journal reflections were *lonely*, *exhausted*, and *stressed*. In triangulating the multiple data sources, the trends that emerged across all six participants were high levels of stress, exhaustion, and isolation. Each data source confirmed participants' feelings of incompetence, insecurity, and loneliness, as well as an ongoing search for connections. For example, Teacher D reported, "I know I need to make new friends, but that is the last thing I want to do after I put so much energy out with these kids all day is to have to sell myself to others." Participants' level of social isolation impacted all areas of their personal and professional lives, including how they responded to attention at their school sites.

Several of the participants made personal connections with work colleagues that encouraged feelings of belonging and connection. "I have a few more people I can rely on than I did in July for sure," said Teacher B. Others got comfortable with their independence at school and made one or two personal connections that helped them feel supported.

In addition to expressing the need for additional friends, support, and time, participants also struggled with concerns about housing and finances, particularly as the school year began. These themes were most evident in participants' journal reflections, where *money* and *house* were words indicating the most-repeated ideas (see Figure 6 for a compilation of all participant responses).



Figure 6: Needs Most Frequently Mentioned by Participants

Interestingly, participants' self-confidence and belief in their own resilience shifted depending on their work/life balance. As personal issues arose, participants reported being more overwhelmed and stressed professionally. In each instance where a participant was experiencing a personal issue, that participant ranked their attitude about teaching and their professional self-confidence lower. This diminished self-confidence in the classroom as well. Most participants reported that, when they were feeling poorly about their abilities to teach or were consumed with personal issues, their students also behaved poorly. As Teacher E said, "Wow—that's scary...it's really true that if I am having a bad day, my students probably have a worse day. Everything is connected."

Participants' perceptions of themselves shifted over the course of this study. Participants were surprised at their high levels of stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, yet all noted pride in themselves for moving across the country and persevering through their first semester. "It's exhausting, and yet I am here every day for my kids because I am committed to them," stated Teacher F. Teacher C shared, "Some days I feel like a complete failure, and yet I get up the next day and think—well, good for me...I am acting like a grown-up and moved across the country and I am a teacher."

Participants also noticed positive changes in themselves as a result of the intervention. Participants' abilities to articulate their feelings, needs, and perceptions while utilizing the specific skills and strategies discussed in the face-to-face sessions became evident. Participants expressed their feelings using words like *resilient*, *self-confidence*, *advocate*, and *persevere* more frequently in later sessions than in earlier sessions. Teacher C indicated, "Being adaptive has helped me a lot, and I've had lots of things thrown at me." Teacher A reported, "Yes, I know now that I am resilient. I can use that term with confidence now."

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were used to assess participant changes across the intervention. Initially, key words in each participant's response were highlighted. Then the responses were examined by question, noting similar trends across participant responses and highlighting big ideas. Similarly, the questionnaire's Likert-scale

items were reviewed first by participant response and then by question, with the frequency of each response for each question calculated to explore trends. For example, before the intervention, 50% of participants strongly agreed that they had a network of emotional support, whereas 83% strongly agreed at the end. Before the intervention, 50% of participants strongly agreed that they had overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge, while 67% strongly agreed at the end. Tellingly, 50% of participants strongly agreed before the intervention that they finished what they started, but 100% strongly agreed at the end. The following are other notable results:

- 67% of participants reported becoming more aware of their stress level because of the intervention.
- 67% of participants reported an increase in their resilience.
- 83% of participants reported an increase in their ability to overcome setbacks.
- 67% of participants reported an increase in intentional communication of their own needs.

Overall, participants' needs, perceptions, and feelings were very similar to one another. They all experienced the initial culture shock of a move and orientation to teaching. Over the semester, they transitioned into feeling more comfortable in their new home state and school and mildly proud of their personal resiliency and perseverance. In the final face-to-face support session, most of the group was still struggling to decide if they had made the right career choice and decision to move across the country. Since the conclusion of the study, one participant has left the teaching profession, and the rest (83%) remain in the same district.

Intervention Impressions

In the narrative portion of the questionnaire and in the interviews, participants noted changes in how they perceived themselves as a result of the intervention and how they found the intervention to be beneficial for their personal and professional growth. Participants reported that the support sessions, journal reflections, and mapping activities gave them the opportunity to intentionally pause to reflect and consider how they were changing. In some cases, participants discussed realizing that they may have been overconfident in their ability to navigate the complexities of the classroom and initially discounted the impact that moving would have on them. The reality of their first semester in a new state and new job stunned them, and they reported feeling grateful that the intervention allowed them to share their fears and feelings of being overwhelmed with others experiencing similar circumstances.

In considering the face-to-face sessions, participants noted that the sessions provided them with a place to come where they felt safe sharing their experiences, needs, feelings, and perceptions. The interviews revealed that an authentic sense of camaraderie and

community had developed within the group, and participants reported that they developed a greater awareness of their own resilience and stress-management abilities as a result of the sessions. Teacher A noted, “They’ve really helped me. I didn’t really care what we talked about. I just wanted to be there. It made me feel important and special and cared for.” Teacher F shared, “It was good to be a part of a group where everyone understood what everyone was going through. Like, we are all very different—do different things and come from different places—yet all understood that we were going through the same thing.” Teacher E indicated, “Being pulled from the classroom adds a different aspect to the sessions because it doesn’t cut into after-work planning or weekend relaxation; I can still get those things done...” All participants shared similar reflections about how the sessions provided them with a purposeful pause and a safe place to share their experiences. Their connections with each other provided them with a supportive community that they had not yet established elsewhere, being new to the state.

Discussing the journal reflections, participants shared that they viewed the reflections as important in increasing their self-confidence and valuable in providing them a visual reflection of their first semester of teaching. Teacher A noted, “Looking for pictures that showed my mood was cathartic, and I really liked working on the iPad.” Teacher B shared, “Doing the weekly reflections using pictures allowed me to be creative and capture my experiences using whatever ‘medium’ I wanted...I could choose how to express my feelings and experiences.” Teacher D responded, “It wasn’t too much work, but it made us think about how we were feeling and what was going on.” Overall, the response to the journal reflections was positive, and participants appreciated how the reflections created a forum to capture their thoughts and feelings and encapsulate their experiences into a weekly visual product.

DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to develop and evaluate supports for out-of-state beginning teachers in Arizona, to improve their first-semester experiences and perceptions, and ultimately to increase their retention. This study was small, though there are conclusions and recommendations that can be useful for other districts around the country. There is a growing concern that a very high percentage of young teachers will continue to leave the profession unless this issue is addressed (Tirozzi et al., 2014). The participants in this study said the intervention made them feel supported within their new teaching environment, and they were retained at a higher-than-average rate.

To retain beginning teachers, districts and schools need to understand the challenges of recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Budget cuts have drastically reduced induction and mentoring/support programming for teachers. The estimated cost for implementing an effective retention and induction program is \$6,000 per teacher in Arizona

(Burroughs et al., 2019; Tirozzi et al., 2014). Increased education funding is imperative to resolve this state crisis: “Underfunding is a significant contributor to Arizona’s low academic performance and its diminishing ability to promote excellence in teaching” (Tirozzi et al., 2014, p.8). Arizona teacher pay remains one of the lowest in the country, and the state maintains one of the highest class-size ratios in the nation (ASPAA, 2020). To navigate the teacher shortage, “Arizona’s leaders must make a collective effort to ensure the recruitment and retention of effective teachers through increased funding and improved working conditions” (APSAA, 2020, para. 4).

The recommendations here were provided to Arizona districts that are deep in a retention crisis (ASPAA, 2020). This phenomenon of recruiting out-of-state beginning teachers and the transient opportunities of the profession affirm the ongoing need for differentiated support that address different needs than the ones of in-state beginning teachers (Evans et al., 2019). Only 31 states require induction and mentoring, and only 22 states explicitly encourage reduced teaching loads for new teachers or offer mentor teachers; thus, the framework presented in the study is relevant to consider across the nation (Evans et al., 2019). The considerations for the model are provided below by district level and site level.

This study, since it was conducted at the district level, did not directly impact the school-site-level contextual experiences of each participant, but it did create an overall awareness of the challenges faced by out-of-state beginning teachers. Districts must be responsible for creating support structures for such teachers. They can also prioritize district-level funding for beginning teacher retention, especially for out-of-state teachers.

This study identified critical components to be considered when creating a district-level plan. The creation of a small and intimate community experiencing similar challenges was a key component of the success of this intervention. In the interviews, participants noted that they felt supported and validated through sharing their experiences with others who faced similar challenges. Teacher E shared, “Being pulled out of the classroom to go to a support session that was set up to be relaxing was so helpful to me. In the sessions we pinpointed what those stressors were...that helped.” This is supported by the literature as well; recent studies of beginning teacher retention and resilience in Australia reveal that different types of support are valued by beginning teachers (versus the types valued by veteran teachers) and appear to influence teachers’ views of their own resilience (Downey, 2018; Mansfield & Beltman, 2014; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). The supports valued by beginning teachers include being listened to, being offered advice and professional knowledge, being acknowledged and appreciated, having the realities of teaching confirmed, and being challenged professionally (Downey, 2018; Mansfield & Beltman, 2014; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). All these forms of support appeared crucial to facilitating beginning teachers’ resilience in this study as well. In receiving these types of support, participants reported feeling more confident and competent in their teaching roles, making

them able to successfully assume a positive teacher identity (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

A skilled facilitator who understands the experiences of beginning teachers is another key component in any intervention. The underlying foundations of the C.A.R.E. model were caring, compassion, and empathy. The personality and skills of the facilitator are thus a critical attribute for district support. Ideally, any beginning teacher support sessions would be run by someone who understands, empathizes with, and is willing to listen to participants' stories and experiences without solving every problem. In this study, the facilitator's focus was on empowering participants to advocate for themselves and ask for help and direction when needed. The facilitator also emphasized increasing self-efficacy and developing confidence to explore problems. Personal and professional lives are so intertwined for beginning teachers that it is important to find a facilitator who truly understands the duality of this group's experience in being new to the state and new to the profession: "All of the significant relationships in which the early career teachers engaged provided a variety of support, the nature of which crossed traditional boundaries of the personal and professional; school and home; and face-to-face and online" (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014, p. 112).

Finally, district personnel can intentionally structure beginning teacher support systems to include multiple layers at the district and individual school site levels. Papatraianou and Le Cornu (2014) found that schools need to promote informal staff interaction, which allows new teachers to develop supportive relationships with colleagues. Further, district-level support systems need to acknowledge and invest in the provision of informal support and learning opportunities for beginning teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

At the site level, administrators need to be fully informed about and committed to differentiating support for beginning teachers (Schlichte et al., 1999; A. Watkins, 2016; Weller, 1982; Williment, 2003). According to feedback from participants, school-site-level support from administrators committed to establishing positive relationships with beginning teachers was critical for their success. Administrators can also assist with communication about upcoming initiatives; by front-loading information to beginning teachers and giving them strategies for success, they continue to build relationships and empower beginning teachers as contributing members of the staff. Beginning teachers want to feel that their input and insights are valuable to their administrators: "A principal who advocates for making reasonable working conditions for new teachers district policy, can change the status quo" (A. Watkins, 2016, p. 3). The importance of a principal's acknowledgement and recognition of beginning teachers cannot be overstated.

Administrators can also prevent their beginning teachers from taking on too many after-school assignments, teams, or clubs (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Gossom, 2004; A. Wakens, 2016). Beginning teachers struggle with life/work balance, and efficient lesson planning and

grading is developed over time, leaving beginning teachers with less extra time than their veteran counterparts. The challenge is that beginning teachers tend to struggle financially, making the additional income from after-school opportunities highly appealing despite the additional burden and stress. Administrators must try to avoid overworking this group. Partnering beginning teachers and veteran teachers with shared responsibilities is one approach to consider. Administrators can also align beginning teachers with positive and encouraging staff members who are willing to provide guidance and mentoring (Tait, 2008; A. Watkins, 2016). Certainly, the decisions administrators make regarding their beginning teachers will impact the ultimate retention and self-efficacy of this group.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main limitations of this study is the small number of participants. While the intimacy of the group was a critical component in enhancing its success and feeling of community, it does limit the ability to generalize these findings to other out-of-state beginning teachers in similar programs in a different district with a different facilitator. This study was also contextually based on specific characteristics of the participants' school district, potentially limiting its applicability to other school districts with different characteristics. For example, release time was secured for participants to attend face-to-face sessions, so they were able to participate as part of the workday. Asking already-stretched beginning teachers to add to their workloads by coming to support sessions after school hours would likely not provide them the same benefits.

One limitation in data collection for this study was not recording the entirety of each support session, meaning there may have been data that was not fully documented or captured. Participants felt uncomfortable about having audio- or video-recorded sessions. Instead, a second recorder took notes during the sessions, as well as participating in a debriefing after each session, as an alternate way to capture and verify the majority of session content. Even with such note-taking, however, there may have been comments and ideas missed.

In terms of future directions, this study is just the beginning of this work. The goal was to create a systemic model of support for out-of-state beginning teachers to maximize the number who remain in teaching. It was about more than just retention, however. The C.A.R.E. model focused on changing self-perceptions and increasing resiliency in new out-of-state teachers. Their ability to reflect, advocate for themselves, navigate stressors, and develop into a supportive community is critical. This work is even more critical with the isolation that has emerged due to COVID-19 and teaching remotely (De La Rosa, 2020).

Despite our successes, there are changes we would suggest for this model's use in the future. In order to know if the intervention truly impacted retention, the model must be extended through the end of the school year to permit participants to decide their plans for

the following school year. At the end of this study, in the middle of the school year, our participants were at their lowest point (as expected) and thus uncertain about remaining in their teaching positions the following year. Extending these supports could bring them to the end of the year in a much more successful way.

The time of the face-to-face sessions also would ideally be shortened in future iterations. Each of our sessions was three and a half hours, which was too long according to participant feedback. As a result, there was a need to fill the time with content rather than allowing conversation and brainstorming to occur organically. The length of time lent itself more to formal professional development than to the informal, supportive setting we were attempting to create. Ideally, sessions would be approximately one and a half hours long and would take place at a coffee shop or other informal venue (rather than in a more formal training room as was the case in this study) to reinforce the focus on personal connection and sharing.

Extending the participant group is another avenue for improvement and expansion. Mansfield et al. (2019) note that school leaders may need direct professional learning on creating a collaborative culture that enhances resiliency. All teachers benefit from a positive school culture, but the beginning teacher is even more sensitive to positive and collaborative environments (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2012; A. Watkins, 2016). Ongoing professional development for site administrators and district leadership that includes recognition of the needs of beginning teachers has the potential to broaden the impact of supporting these beginning teachers and increase their retention.

CONCLUSION

Across the United States, beginning teacher retention rates are extraordinarily low; only 50% of teachers remain in the classroom after five years (AEE, 2004; Chang, 2009; Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this crisis: “In fact the need for great teachers and leaders is now greater than ever, particularly for the students most affected by the crises at hand” (Lachalan et al., 2020, p. 2). This study supported out-of-state beginning teachers in Arizona, where the retention numbers continue to be in a crisis (ASPAA, 2020). In this context, a platform was created for a group of such teachers to share insights into their struggles to remain in teaching after the first year. It is clear that teachers must be nurtured and cared for in order for them to fully devote their time and energy to effectively caring for the students in their classroom. The type of support shown in this study, though provided only a small sample and was localized to an Arizona district, has the potential to support other beginning teachers who are from out of state or moving for their new jobs. Increasing self-awareness and resiliency has the potential to create a ripple effect to retain more beginning teachers, as they become more likely to

persevere, ask for help, connect with others, and achieve a healthy life/work balance while positively impacting students and their community.

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