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First-Year Teacher Training Programs: Examining the Structure of Support

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in TESOL degree at SIT Graduate Institute

April 21, 2021

IPP Advisor: Dr. Susan Barduhn

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Abstract:

With the teacher turnover rate at an alarmingly high incline in the United States, this project seeks to reveal the lack of support that first-year teachers experience during their first year of teaching in the United States. First, this paper examines the history of teacher training in the United States and how the historical context has shaped teacher training today. By investigating current first-year teacher training programs, it is evident that programs designed to support first-year teachers throughout their first year of teaching are less numerous than programs that prepare teachers prior to their first year of teaching. Additionally, this project reviews an anonymous survey about teachers' support during their first year of teaching. Lastly, I offer ways in which first-year teacher training programs could improve to best support the needs of first-year teachers. The relevance of this topic hinges on the importance of the field of education; without teachers, what would the field of education be?

ERIC Descriptors:

Teacher burnout; Teacher orientation, Faculty development, Teacher Training, First-Year

Teachers

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I. Introduction

The first year of teaching is an incredibly complex, meaningful and formative year for any teacher. It is an experience that shapes us both internally and externally, that influences our teaching for years to come. The biggest question that loomed over my head as a first-year teacher was: do I know enough?

Today, as a teacher who is only in their third year of teaching, I can say with certainty that I did know enough because so much of the first year of teaching is learning. Being a new teacher is commonly compared to the experience of “trying to fly an airplane while building it” (Powell, 2015). All of the things I didn't know- how to actually build a classroom community, how to enact routines and procedures, and more, came into existence simply through practice. But this knowing probed an even deeper question: how are first-year teachers prepared? What support and resources are first-year teachers offered? Can any of these supports make a difference in making the first year of teaching more meaningful?

Although I can say with certainty that I did know “enough” my first year of teaching, I see so many missed learning opportunities for myself as I reflect on my own experience. Often, I wanted to talk with my peers, co-teachers and administrators but simply didn't feel as though I could or should. I see now that the nights I spent awake, worrying about my impact as an educator, worrying about angry parents, worrying about the well-being of my students, and worrying that all of these worries were not normal, are worries that many first-year teachers share. This is not to say that I do not experience these worries still today, but rather I have found a normalcy in my experience as a teacher, and I found ways to holistically support myself in my career.

What I wish for every first-year teacher is that they are holistically supported. By holistically supported I mean that their teaching practices, teaching experiences, teacher identity, and human well-being are all held in a space of support, knowledge and compassion. Ultimately, I wish for every first-year teacher to be able to develop into themselves as an educator in a supported setting in which they can make deep meaning for themselves, their students and their communities. These wishes bring me back to the intentions of this project: to examine how first-year teachers are commonly trained and supported, to analyze first-hand anecdotes and experiences from real teachers about their first year of teaching, and to offer ways that first-year teacher training and support programs can improve to best meet the needs of first-year teachers.

First, I will provide a brief history of first-year teacher training programs and examine their structure and intentions in supporting and preparing first-year teachers. Then I will examine current models of first-year teacher training programs and see how they vary based on teaching fields and careers and methodological approaches. Next, I will review the data from a survey I created and used to collect information about teachers' experiences and support during their first year of teaching. I will analyze the data, note commonalities, and make connections between these first-hand experiences and the ways in which first-year teacher training programs are commonly structured. Based on the data from the survey and my personal experience, I will offer ways in which first-year teacher training programs and supports can improve to holistically serve teachers during their first year of training. The advice I hope to offer in this section is meant to be both inspiring and aspiring; to perhaps inspire a teacher on an individual level, and to perhaps help a teacher training program aspire to better meet the needs of the teachers they support. Finally, I wish to speak to the relevance and importance of this project in a society where teacher turnover rates are alarming high. I truly believe that part of the solution in addressing teacher

retention is by deeply examining and restructuring the ways in which we support teachers, especially first-year teachers. All in all, this project is meant to shed light on how first year teacher training programs used to be, how first-year teacher training programs are, and how they can be improved upon in the future to best support the needs of teachers, and in turn, support the needs of society.

II. Brief History of Teacher Training for First-Year Teachers in the U.S.

I find it important to briefly cover the history of teacher training in the United States because so many factors that have shaped the current state of teacher training are a result of the history of this system. Many teachers in the twenty-first century hear the phrase “well, it's always been that way”, but that simply is not the truth. Changes and developments in the field of education have shaped teacher training programs; however, it is important to note that, “from the perspective of more than three centuries of schooling, the creation of formal arrangements for training and certifying teachers is relatively recent” (Lortie, 2002, p. 17). My intention in this section is to provide meaningful information to shed insight into the past of first-year teacher training in the United States so we can better understand the current state of first-year teacher training today.

When I think of teachers in American history, my mind immediately reverts to an old little red schoolhouse, where a young woman teacher led a small group of local students through books of arithmetic and literature. But where did this teacher come from? How were they chosen? How were they prepared? Fraser (2007) cites that from the American Revolution through the late 1950s, most teachers were not formally trained. Rather, they were simply chosen by their town or community as the best suited person for the job and agreed to the low wages the job paid. During the nineteenth century, teachers were monitored on a local level, in which the, “usual procedure was to visit the school periodically and demand recitations from the students” (Lortie, 2002, p.3). Another perspective that shatters my mental image is that during this historical period, most teachers were male because they typically were most knowledgeable in math and reading (NYU, n.d.). For career men, teaching was simply a stepping-stone job. Take John Adams for example, who taught grammar school for three years after he graduated from

Harvard before leaving to pursue his career in law and politics (Fraser, 2007, 11). Albeit the fact that this is decades ago, it speaks volumes to the American cultural perspective of the role of a teacher. It is not one of permanence or significant meaning, but rather a job that you take in order to get a better job in the future.

Although the majority of teachers did not receive formal training, that is not to say that formal training did not exist. Programs that sought out to prepare teachers in their content knowledge slowly grew in numbers and were often short, post-elementary or high school level programs focused on, “subject matter knowledge, understanding of pedagogy and the learning process, and dedication to the work of teaching and the success of students” (Fraser, 2007, 4). I think what is most important to note about this historical period is that although these programs did exist, most teachers were not formally trained. A critical component that fostered the development of teacher training was the construction of mass schooling that began in the nineteenth century (Lortie, 2002, pg.3). As school systems grew, the need for teachers also grew, and consequentially so did the need to train teachers. As Lortie (2002) states, “in the early days of the modern school system, school boards certified teachers, hired and fired at will, and paid individual teachers as they thought was appropriate” (p. 5). At this time, certification for teachers was centralized in the field of education, but at the beginning of the twentieth century, it became the responsibility of the state, and requirements began to differ (Lortie, 2002, p.5). This localization in turn influenced how teachers were becoming trained.

It was not until the 1890s that teacher preparation programs began to change as universities and colleges began to departmentalize, and teacher education became, “one among many university responsibilities” (Fraser, 2007, 4). While this shift was beneficial because it heightened the requirements to become a teacher, it opened up a difficult pedagogical question in

teacher education. Is it better to keep teacher education self-contained, or should teacher education be a department within a university or college? While this may seem inconsequential, it largely affects the value of teacher education. Consider this: when is the last time you saw a college or university with multiple departments in which the education department was the most funded and valued? Even today, that is a rare sight. As a result, teacher education as a whole slowly slid to the bottom of importance on the university and college level, and it led to a shift in what teachers were being taught too. Instead of focusing on preparing to be a teacher- what the role entails, how to actually do it- the emphasis was placed on theory and content knowledge (Fraser, 2007, p. 4). In *Traits and Conditions that Accelerate Teacher Learning* (1998), Barduhn speaks to the, “inadequacy of models in which theory and practice are not sufficiently related to each other” (p. 11). The danger here is that these programs are deeply distanced from the practice of what it actually means to be a teacher, and as we see in our current statistics of teacher retention rates, we see that few teachers actually know what to expect during their first year of teaching. It is almost as if they were given all the knowledge, but never given the tools or practice. As stated by Lortie, “the lack of large-scale training of teachers at their place of work has had, as we shall see, important consequences for the development of teaching as an occupation” (Lortie, 2002, p. 19).

Since teacher education has majoritively shifted to university and colleges, not all too much has changed. Yes, there are a variety of other programs, specialized training and post-graduate certificates and teacher development that teachers can engage in, but the majority of teachers today were certified through an education program at a university or college. What I would like to do now is to shift the focus to what these programs actually look like; how they are structured and implemented. For the sake of this paper’s length, I will examine one university

level program and two current first-year teacher training programs that differ in style and structure.

III. A Look into Current First-Year Teacher Training Programs

The biggest indicator that first-year teachers are not adequately supported is that when you google search “first-year teacher training programs”, the majority of results are articles dedicated to describing why first-year teachers need support, not actual programs or training that offer this support. An alarming statistic from the New Teacher Center found that only 29 states, or 58% of states, require support for first-year teachers (First Year Teacher Support Strategies and Programs, 2020 May). What I hope to point out in this section of the paper is that while student teachers in education preparation programs often receive support, mentorship and/or guidance of some type during their program, once they are actually employed as a first-year teacher, most or all supports vanish and they are left to their own devices as they navigate their first real year of teaching. Unlike student teachers or interns, first-year teachers, “often have no assistance and are fearful of asking for help” (Podsen and Denmark, 2007, p.4). This quote presents two major issues: the lack of the support and the fear that accompanies asking for support. Where does this fear come from? Perhaps it is the imposed sense that first-year teachers should know what they are doing. Perhaps it is the lack of support or space to ask questions and receive genuine help. Regardless, it is clear that first-year teachers in the United States are not adequately supported during their first year of teaching.

Before examining two programs designed to support first-year teachers during their first year of teaching, let us briefly look at the structure of a teacher training program designed for student teachers that exists within a university. Although these programs are not a training or support for teachers *during* their first year of teaching, the reason I want to examine it is to demonstrate the pathway that many teachers in the United States experience. Most teachers go through an education program at a university or college that offers them support as a student

teacher, and subsequently when they actually begin their job as a first-year teacher, they are left without support during their first year of teaching. One of the main purposes of pursuing an education degree is to gain licensure in the state you wish to teach in, which means that it can be difficult to distinguish which programs are superior to others due to the fact that many students choose their school based on the state they wish to become teachers in. Historically, this is a result of state governances in the mid-1900s determining that teachers must have a college degree and be licensed to teach (Fraser, 2007, p.197). Fraser refers to the immediate shift from specific teacher institutions to education programs at universities and colleges as the “university monopoly” (2007, p. 197). The unfortunate result of this monopoly, which is still present today in the 21st century, is that pedagogy and content knowledge are prioritized over professional knowledge and classroom skills (Fraser, 2007, p. 3). For example, let us take a brief look at Springfield College’s undergraduate Education degree that also offers licensure in the state of Massachusetts. Springfield College offers a variety of majors within their education department, and students can choose their education major based on what type of licensure they are seeking (i.e. elementary, secondary). Note that education students can only choose education as a secondary major; they are required to major in another subject as outlined by the education department based on the type of licensure they are seeking. For example, if you wanted to secondarily major in elementary education, your primary major could be English or Mathematics. Additionally, students are required to take “core” classes in the humanities prior to taking education specific classes. The Springfield College website states that education students have opportunities for gaining experience teaching and that the college encourages, “active learning experiences to help you develop your skills and comfort level” (Springfield College, n.d.). The website makes it clear that the intention of the education program is to prepare

teachers for licensure and does not give specifics on the structure of student teaching or teaching experience the students will engage in. Overall, this program speaks to the fact that many education undergraduate programs focus more heavily on pedagogy than skills and experience and may not adequately prepare teachers for their first year of teaching without support from their college.

In order to better understand what programs or training do exist to support first-year teachers, let us examine two different programs that support first-year teachers during their first year of teaching. The first is a program designed by Teach for America (TFA), a popular teacher preparation program in the United States whose mission is to, “confront educational inequity by teaching for at least two years and then working with unwavering commitment from every sector of society to create a nation free from this injustice” (Teach for America, 2018, August 23). Teachers apply to TFA and are then assigned a geographical area in which they may apply for a teaching position (Rappaport et al., 2019, p.2). The summer before they begin their first year of teaching, they undergo an intensive five to seven week training during which they teach summer school. A report of the program states that many of these trainings are led by TFA alum (Rappaport et al., 2019, p.1). The specific program I researched was based on what TFA termed the “learning cycle”, a process in which teachers observe, practice, teach, then receive feedback (Rappaport et al., 2019, p.3). The intention in this training process was to bolster the new teacher’s knowledge, practice and confidence in their teaching, which in turn would, “strengthen their commitment to teaching and to TFA’s mission, and to make them more likely to remain in the program for the duration of the two-year commitment” (Teach for America, 2018, August 23). What makes this program strong is that its intention for its first-year teachers goes beyond

giving them concrete knowledge that simply prepares them for teaching; the program aspires to build first-year teachers' confidence to develop a deep commitment to teaching as a profession.

While this is the training that precedes TFA teachers' actual first year of teaching, I thought its approach was important to describe in detail because the pre-training affects the structure of the training offered during their two years of teaching in the program. The TFA website states that during the two years in the program, teachers are offered ongoing professional development. TFA teachers engage in a program throughout their first 90 days that helps them to incorporate new practices into their classrooms. They also attend professional development and/or training on a monthly basis. Additionally, each teacher is assigned a coach who observes them in their classroom and provides ongoing feedback and guidance to support the teacher's development. Also, some TFA teachers are assigned to groups of teachers in their geographical area who they may work closely with and receive support from. Although the website does not offer specific strategies, training or teacher testimonials about this support, what is clear is that this program has been designed to not only support teachers prior to their TFA service, but throughout the entirety of their two-year commitment. The program prioritizes experiential learning, as demonstrated by the "learning cycle" pre-service training, and by the ongoing observations and feedback teachers receive from their coaches (Rappaport et al., 2019, p.3). Some TFA teachers are also able to receive support from fellow TFA teachers, which is a form of peer support. Despite the fact that the TFA website does not have teacher testimonials that speak to the support teachers experience in the program, the website does offer an important statistic that speaks to the impact of the program's support in the long term. Four out of five TFA alum "work in education or in fields that impact low-income communities" (Teach for America, 2018, August 23). What this statistic demonstrates is the power of TFA teachers' experiences;

that the majority of them were positive enough to keep them committed to the field of education. While this does not necessarily mean that 80% of alumni are teachers, it shows that many of the TFA alum are committed to the field of education. Overall, I think TFA offers a well-rounded example of a non-university or college teacher preparation program that offers training to teachers both pre-service and during service.

Secondly, let us examine a program that began in 2015 in the state of Arkansas that requires all novice, or in other words, teachers in their first year of full-time teaching, to have at least one full year of mentoring support (First Year Teacher Support Strategies and Programs, 2020 May). As described in First Year Teacher Support Strategies and Programs, all novice Arkansas teachers who are on a type of licensure referred to as “pathway” are required two years of mentoring support, and this novice mentoring support includes both in person and online mentoring during scheduled times (2020 May). Every novice teacher is matched with a mentor, and the mentor is a teacher who has had successful evaluations as a licensed teacher for a minimum of three years. A study done in 2019 examined the efficacy of mentoring in a central Arkansas district states that, “novice teachers thrived when they received informal mentoring from veteran teachers...these interactions helped them to grow professionally” (Jackson, p. 65). This study not only speaks to the impact that the program had on novice teachers in Arkansas, but it also illustrates the overall efficacy of mentoring as an approach for supporting first-year teachers. Another benefit of this program is that it allows for a focus on professional growth. Since both novice and mentor teachers are already licensed to some degree, whether it is provisional or professional, they already are knowledgeable in the content which they are teaching. This knowledge allows them to focus more on teaching strategies and what it truly means to be a classroom teacher. This focusing aspect of the program vastly contrasts to that of

TFA because TFA is designed for individuals who would like to become a teacher, not licensed teachers who are in their first year of teaching. The difference is that TFA must focus on both content and teaching approaches, whereas the Arkansas mentoring program can focus more on teaching approaches and the whirlwind experience of first-year teaching. As Podsen and Denmark point out, “we know quite often that pedagogy is the main focus in our teacher preparation programs, but once out in the field, [they] must also confront a roller coaster ride of emotions and personalities within the context of the school community” (2007, p.3). As the study in 2019 by Jackson demonstrates, mentoring was an effective way in helping new teachers to confront these emotional experiences in their first year of teaching. For example, participants in the study reported that mentoring, “helped to rid them of feelings of isolation” (Jackson, 2019, p. 65). This statement demonstrates the meaningful nature of mentoring as an approach for supporting first-year teachers, especially in the many areas of teaching that often go overlooked, such as the emotional aspect and experience during a teacher’s first year.

Overall, I think the program in Arkansas speaks to the power of policy; imagine if all fifty states were to enact a similar policy in which all first-year teachers in the United States received some type of support during their first year of teaching. As the Arkansas program shows, even a program based on mentoring has a significant impact on new teachers’ experiences and development. What the programs in this section highlight is that there is a clear lack of programs that successfully support first-year teachers *during* their first year of teaching. While there are a plethora of university, college, and other types of educator licensure programs that support teachers on their track to becoming a teacher, once a teacher begins a full-time job, often all of the supports are removed. As a result, teacher retention rates are steadily decreasing in the United States, and the career choice of becoming a teacher is under scrutiny. Additionally,

this lack of support even infiltrates into teachers' dispositions and teaching methodologies. Poden and Denmark (2007) state, "those teachers who make it through the first three years often develop a 'survival mentality' that negatively impacts on their openness to be reflective and highly skilled teachers" (p.5). What is shocking about this statement is that it highlights the importance of supporting teachers during their first year. The statement suggests that if teachers are not supported during their first year, it is unlikely they will gain reflective skills that enable their overall growth and development as professional teachers. This effect is equally as daunting as the lack of retention issue of teachers because it demonstrates that the teachers who decide to remain in the profession might not be the best teachers they could be. All of this goes back to the purpose of a teacher, and what society wants from a teacher. Simply put, if the United States wants their students to be the best learners they can be, there must be teacher support for first-year teachers so that the teachers can be the best they can be- both in their first year and in their long-term career.

IV. Survey

A. Structure and Implications

In order to best understand what teachers experienced during their first year of teaching and what kinds of support or training they were offered, I decided to conduct an anonymous survey to collect first-hand responses. The anonymous survey was open to any teacher, of any content area, at any level of experience, in order to maximize responses. However, it is important to consider that some teachers' responses may have been a reflection of their first year of teaching twenty years ago, whereas other teachers may have completed the survey while they were in their first year of teaching. This range of experience is beneficial for variety and to maximize the total responses, but one implication it may have is that teachers could potentially inaccurately recall the support of training they received during their first year of teaching. In total, the survey received 26 participant responses, with all 26 participants responding to all questions.

The survey consisted of six questions: one short answer, one multiple choice and six longer responses. First, participants were asked to describe their experience during their first year of teaching in two words. The purpose of this question was to gather emotive words that illuminated the overall feeling of the participants' experiences in their first year of teaching. The second question, a multiple choice, asked participants if they received any support and/or training during their first year of teaching. The answer options were "yes", "no", or "unsure". The following questions asked participants to describe the support and/or training they received, how this training and/or support helped them, how this training and/or support may have lacked in supporting them, and lastly how this training and/or support could be improved.

B. Results and Analysis

Question 1

Out of 26 total participants, 25 responded to the question using two adjectives to describe their first year of teaching. Twenty three percent of participants chose one of their adjectives as “overwhelming”, which demonstrates their lack of support in navigating the many challenges that arise during a teacher’s first year. Other adjectives that more than one participant used to describe their experience included: stressful, exhausting and exciting. The correlation in these responses demonstrates that many teachers felt similarly about their experience as first-year teachers, and that generally the feelings associated with their experience were not positive.

Question 2

Out of 26 total participants, 50% responded that they received some type of support and/or training during their first year of teaching; 26.9% responded that they did not receive any type of support and/or training, and 23.1% responded that they were unsure if they received any support and/or training during their first year of teaching. Although it is positive that half of the participants did receive support and/or training, it is unclear whether this support and/or training was formal or informal. Additionally, the 23.1% of participants who responded that they were unsure may be due to participants not being able to accurately recall the details of their first year of teaching, and/or the support and/or training they received was so minimal that it does not make an impact.

Question 3

Forty-two percent of participants described formal support and/or training during their first year of teaching, including mentorship, professional development, or other support offered through a program run by their school or district. I want to note of this 42%, three participants

who articulated multiple forms of support were working at private or charter schools and/or enrolled in a teacher program that supported them. Sixty eight percent of participants received informal support and/or training from co-teachers and colleagues, and of that 68%, two participants cited they received no support and/or training at all. In describing their experience, one participant stated, “Thrown to the wolves. I even substituted classes that were not my own subject”. Another participant shared, “I didn't receive very much support, but my boss (the director of studies) did answer questions I had and told me to talk with the other teacher who was teaching the same level as I was”. These two examples demonstrate the lack of support and/or training available to first year teachers and demonstrates how this lack of support is often translated into teachers, and other people, assuming that first-year teachers should know what they are doing.

Question 4

Out of the participants who cited in question three that they received support via a mentor, the majority responded that they felt supported by their mentor in many ways. One participant stated, “I was able to go to someone whenever I wasn't sure of what needed to be done”. Another participant wrote, “She gave me some advice about classroom management. She also let me know that I was not crazy.” These participant examples demonstrate how mentoring can have a powerful effect in supporting first-year teachers, both in practice and in their emotional well-being. Five participants cited that their training and/or support, or rather lack of it, was not helpful during their first year of teaching. One participant shared, “It wasn't very [supportive], I wish I'd had more”, highlighting both the needs and desires of first-year teachers to be supported.

Question 5

The responses to question five were very varied, and I think this variety speaks to any formal training that teachers may have had prior to their first year of teaching. While some participants cited they wanted more concrete knowledge (i.e. curriculum, classroom management skills, grading, classroom routines), other participants shared the flaws they experienced in their mentoring relationships, and others again cited their total lack of training and/or support. The response that struck me the most was: “Overwhelmed. Needed more support. Everyone is so busy I never wanted to bother them but I was drowning and eventually quit teaching 2/3 of the way through that year”. I want to point out that this is just one response of twenty-six, and that this response shows a truly negative experience on a spectrum of both positive and negative experiences. However, this experience highlights the true damage and loss that can occur as a result of a lack of support and/or training for a first-year teacher. This damage and loss is not only experienced by the teacher themselves, but by the school, and on a larger level it affects the field of education. It is these responses that drive this project and bite deep into the question of: how do we mediate teacher burnout and turnover? In this response, it is clear the answer is: more support and training.

Question 6

This question about how teacher training could be improved also received a variety of responses. Some participants offered mentoring, more professional development, teacher peer groups, co-teaching, and curriculum support. Other participants discussed how their school, district, or even the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) needs to take action to mandate training and/or support for first-year teachers. Two participants described their uncertainty in this response, and even questioned the purpose of this support, stating, “...this field

feels like sink or swim. The most resilient make it through and some leave the field.” While this participant’s statement certainly holds truth, what I hope is that this project juxtaposes this mindset and begs the question: how can we make the role of teaching more inclusive so that teachers do not have to feel as if it is sink or swim? Rather, what I envision for this field is that teachers can make the decision of whether they want to be a teacher or not as a personal career choice, not because of lack of support and/or training. What I think we can take away from the responses to question six is that there are a myriad of ways in which first-year teacher support and/or training can be improved, and these improvements must be based on the assessed, true needs of first-year teachers.

Overall, the results of this survey demonstrate that there is a lack of support and/or training available to first-year teachers and that this lack of support and/or training deeply impacts a first-year teacher’s experience.

V. Looking ahead: How first-year teacher training programs can improve

In this section I will examine ways in which first-year teacher training programs can improve to best support the needs of first-year teachers. The way in which I offer ways for programs to improve are through approaches that support first-year teachers holistically. What I mean by holistic support is that it supports all aspects of teaching; the knowledge teachers have, the strategies teachers use, the range in experiences first-year teachers can have, and the emotional well-being of the teachers. Since so many programs that already exist work to heavily support what happens in the classroom, in this section I want to offer improvements that focus on what happens inside the teacher's mind and how we can support teachers' experiences during their first year. In this section I will examine sources that cover strategies and techniques such as compassion-based mindfulness training, how to nurture competency in first-year teachers as a mentor, and how support for first-year teachers can be differentiated to best support their needs. I also examine the importance of effective teacher training for online teachers, which is an important medium to examine, especially as online teaching and learning continue to expand in education. Lastly, I look at the sequence or schedule of first-year teacher support programs and how they can be best designed to support teacher's needs during their first year.

As stated in prior sections of this paper, while it is critically important for first-year teachers to be trained in education, curriculum, classroom management, and other areas of professional training, it is also vitally important to recognize and meet their needs as people in this profession. Draper-Clarke (2020) writes that, "many young teachers experience burnout, compassion fatigue, or become mentally ill themselves", and that these stresses often cause teachers to leave the profession, which in turn causes a threat to the educational system (p. 59). While the focus here is on the teacher's needs, I feel it is important to note that these needs

impact the educational system at large and thus are extremely important to consider in teacher development. In her thesis titled, “A Differentiated Support Model for First Year Elementary Teachers”, Pieniazkiewicz explores what first-year teachers’ needs are and how to best support them. Pieniazkiewicz cites the importance of first-year teacher mentoring programs that focus on meeting first-year teachers' real needs, not just their assumed needs. In a survey done to ascertain what areas first-year teachers feel they needed the most support in, it is interesting that the majority of participants felt they needed the most support in making accommodations and modifications for students. I find this interesting because not only does it point to an area in teacher training that needs to be further addressed, but it also speaks to the feeling of uncertainty many first-year teachers feel in knowing how to support their students. I imagine that if a new teacher feels they are not meeting their students’ needs, they in turn feel as if they are not fulfilling their role as a teacher and perhaps turn to negative ideas about themselves as teachers.

Therefore, while it is important for teacher training programs to explicitly teach first-year teachers how to meet student needs and make accommodations, it also speaks to the importance of helping first-year teachers feel secure and confident in their role as a teacher. What I think is important to take away from Pieniazkiewicz’s thesis is that it is important to routinely check and assess the needs of first-year teachers so that both the programs and the teachers serving as mentors, can best adjust to support these needs. Thus, one way in which first-year teacher support programs can improve is by regularly assessing the needs of the first-year teachers they are supporting. One way programs may do this is to regularly check-in with their participants through informal surveys.

Now that I have given a piece of general feedback in which programs can incorporate to holistically support their first-year teachers, I want to offer some specific approaches that

programs can use. The first is called cognitive coaching, and this approach is most commonly used in programs that use mentoring as a method of support. The second approach is called compassion-based mindfulness training. This training can be applicable to whole-group or one-on-one mentoring programs, and it is a strategy of mindfulness that works to support the well-being of teachers.

As suggested by Pieniazkiewicz, if we know that first-year teachers are feeling they lack support, then we must ask: what are the best strategies to support them, and more importantly, to support them holistically? In the chapter “Nurturing the Novice: Activate Cognitive Coaching” (2013), Posen and Denmark explore how mentors of first-year teachers can best support the needs of first-year teachers through a technique called cognitive coaching. The aim of cognitive coaching is to, “consciously move your mentee from dependent problem solvers to independent, more skilled problem-solvers” (p. 77). Posen and Denmark explain that effective mentoring helps to, “reduce fears of failure and to increase feelings of security by sequencing their experiences from simple to more complex, giving timely feedback, and probing their thought processes to ensure the development of reflective thinking skills” (2013, p. 77). Through cognitive coaching, mentors can help first-year teachers to develop internal reflection skills that in turn eases their own anxiety about teaching. Reflection is an important skill that teachers must use to effectively grow and develop as professionals, and as stated earlier, teachers who do not practice these skills within their first few years of teaching are often left with a mindset, “that negatively impacts on their openness to be reflective and highly skilled teachers” (Podsen and Denmark, 2007, p.5). Thus, cognitive coaching is a truly important approach in mentoring because it fosters the development of skills that are not only critical during a teacher’s first year, but throughout a teacher’s career. Again, we see that through supporting teacher’s needs holistically, we are

supporting a wide range of first-year teacher needs that ultimately help them feel more secure in their role as a first-year teacher, which in turn fosters their commitment and love to the profession of teaching.

Another strategy that holistically supports teachers is compassion-based mindfulness training. This approach focuses on cultivating compassion through mindfulness-based activities, such as meditation or reflective discussion and can be used in large group or individual settings. Draper Clarke (2020) writes that this approach, “has the potential to enhance resiliency and sustainability in supporting professionals” (p. 61). By focusing on, “the development of the whole person”, mindfulness-based trainings can help teachers to develop skills that foster emotional resiliency and strong self-care (p. 74). As noted previously, these skills not only aid the teacher as an individual, but they also strengthen the educational system as a whole. As Draper Clarke explains, “teaching caregivers to care for themselves in order to reduce burnout, empathy fatigue and departure from the profession cannot be underestimated” (p.76). If this is the case, imagine how powerful it would be for first-year teacher training to include mindfulness-based training. Not only would this training meet and support first-year teachers holistically, but it would also strengthen their commitment to the field of education and in turn strengthen the field itself. Subsequently, teacher training that holistically meets the needs of its participants not only directly impacts the participants themselves, but it impacts the field of education and how we view teacher development as a whole.

Overall, cognitive coaching and compassion based mindful training are just two approaches that demonstrate how first-year teacher training can be improved to holistically support the needs of first-year teachers. I want to disclaim here that there are so many more approaches that could be used in addition to or in place of these strategies; the reason I chose to

focus on these two is because I feel they speak to the field of social-emotional learning. As I mentioned beforehand, in this section I wanted to focus more on what happens inside the teacher, and I feel these two approaches prioritize the well-being of the teacher and seek to support their professional growth.

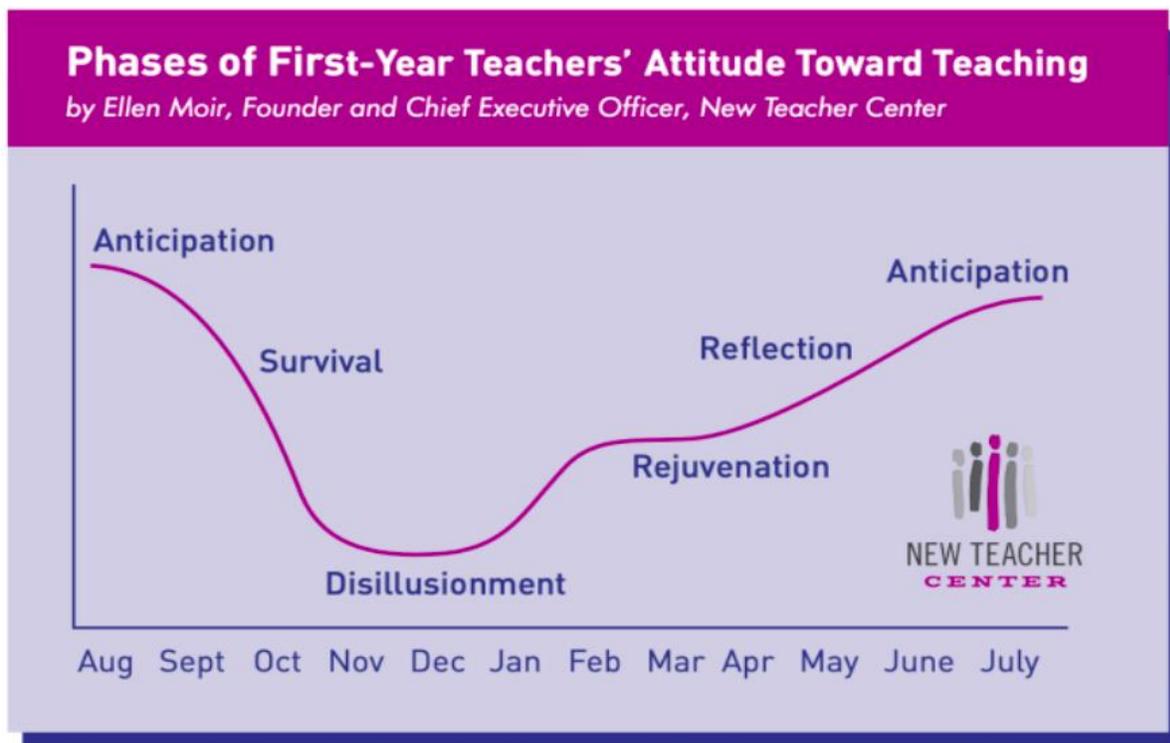
What I do feel I cannot leave out of this section is a way in which technology in teacher training programs can improve to best support first-year teachers' needs. In a world in which learning and teaching are rapidly transitioning to online platforms, it is important to be informed in the ways in which this technology can be taught to best support teacher knowledge and understanding, and ultimately affect how the teachers themselves teach the technology to their students. The way in which we offer training and development about this technology is critical to how this technology is enacted, taught, used, and its effect on teachers and their needs. In a study done in 2003 that examines the value of a holistic approach for training teachers in technology, researchers used, "an approach that modeled various pedagogies...[and] provided a holistic technology-enhanced environment for trainees to experience the use of the computer as an administrative tool, as a tutor, and as a cognitive tool" (Tan et. al., p. 103). They concluded that by using a variety of approaches that considered the wide array of teacher needs, they were able to provide technology training in which participants had a positive experience, and in which participants felt they met the objectives of the training. This study demonstrates that when approached holistically, technology training can be both an effective and positive experience for educators. Keeping this holistic approach in mind will be critical as more and more teachers begin online teaching. What this study suggests is for teacher training programs to be open-minded in the ways in which they present technology. A session on technology could embed the above approaches to better support first-year teachers. For example, perhaps after presenting on a

platform, the program could assess the teachers and ask what they need in order to be successful using the technology. Or, after teachers have completed a training, engage in a mindfulness-based practice that focuses on how the teachers feel after learning about the new technology. Regardless, the takeaway here is for programs to be aware of their teaching strategies, constantly assess what teachers need, and differentiate their instruction to best support all teachers that are learning.

Lastly, I want to speak to the importance of the schedule of a first-year teacher training. A first-year teacher development that occurs during a teacher's first year of teaching should maximize the teacher's experience in concurrence to the range of experiences and emotions that may occur during the school year. Figure 1, a chart by Ellen Moir, demonstrates how first-year teachers' attitudes shift throughout the months of their first year of teaching.

Figure 1

Phases of First-Year Teachers' Attitude Toward Teaching



A first-year teacher training program that holistically supports first-year teachers would be aware of these phases as well as the potential emotions and experiences that may arise as a result of these phases. As a result, programs should prepare content and approaches that resonate with these phases. For example, it would be appropriate to review mindfulness activities for first-year teachers during October as they go into the “survival” phase. It would not be appropriate to take a deep dive into new content or new teaching methodologies in October, as it would very likely overwhelm first-year teachers. In *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* (2018), Aguilar offers a framework based on the twelve months of a year that incorporates reflections, habits and dispositions teachers can cultivate to build resiliency. For example, her November chapter titled, “Take Care of Yourself”, discusses the disillusionment phase in which teachers, both novice and experienced, typically experience a realization that things are not going as smoothly as they desired and feel low morale (Aguilar, 2018, p. 148). The chapter offers reflection questions for readers to consider, discusses the disposition of positive self-perception, and talks about strategies for improving our overall well-being during this phase. Aguilar’s book is a great example of how first-year teacher training programs can use the common experiences of teachers to inform what content to teach and what approaches to use. When first-year teacher support programs become more attuned to what teachers are feeling and experiencing during their first year of teaching, they are more likely to meet a wide variety of needs of the teachers, and in turn, support the teachers in growing and developing as professionals during their first year.

What I hope these sources have brought to light is the importance of approaching teacher training, especially first-year teacher development, through a holistic lens. This approach ensures that all the needs of the teacher, both internal and external are being met. When approached

holistically, teachers are able to not only feel supported, but also learn and gain skills they can use independently and/or internally to solve their issues, boost their confidence, and stay in their role as a teacher. With the high rate of teachers leaving the profession within the first few years of teaching, it is highly important that teacher development seeks to meet all the needs of teachers, not just assumed needs. Also, it is critical that we continue to integrate reflective and mindfulness-based practices that support teachers' self-awareness and regulation as they develop skills for becoming a better teacher. Additionally, it is important to keep these approaches in mind as more and more teachers begin online teaching, and more teachers are trained in technology. Lastly, it is important that programs are attuned to the natural phases that first-year teachers experience throughout the timeline of their first year of teaching, and that the programs plan with awareness to best meet the teacher's needs in different phases. Overall, what all of these suggestions for improving first-year teacher support have in common is that they bring the teacher's experience to the fore-front. By prioritizing the needs and experiences of first-year teachers, we send the message that their needs are important, and their work is valued. I strongly believe that as a result, more first-year teachers would develop professionally and foster a strong commitment to teaching as a profession.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate the many ways in which first-year teacher training programs must be improved to best support the needs of first-year teachers. By first examining the history of teacher training, we were able to understand the historical context that has shaped the state of teacher training today. Reviewing current day teacher training programs called to attention the many ways in which these programs may fail in fully supporting and/or training first-year teachers during their first year of teaching. The survey's result and analysis demonstrated that a large majority of the survey participants had many ideas of ways in which they could have been better supported in their first year of teaching, which speaks to the unsupportive contexts and schools that too many first-year teachers are experiencing, which is ultimately leading to teachers leaving the profession. Lastly, I reviewed some ways in which first-year teacher training programs can be improved to holistically support the needs of first-year teachers. All in all, the purpose of this project was to demonstrate the importance of first-year teacher support, because without proper support and training, first-year teachers are leaving the field of education feeling completely overwhelmed and unsupported. In order for the education system to change for the better, in order for learners across the United States to receive the best education they can, the needs of teachers must be met first. It all begins in the first year of teaching.

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VIII. Appendix

Link to survey instrument: <https://forms.gle/VsnkoTx2k8pAi7AYA>