

PARTICIPATION IN A TRADITIONAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM: A MULTIPLE CASE  
STUDY OF ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED TEACHERS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. This research utilized a qualitative multiple case study design. Guiding this qualitative study were Knowles' adult and Mezirow's transformative learning theories. Knowles' (1970) theory projects the idea of using experiential learning to construct one's own meanings, while Mezirow's (1995) theory advances the idea of humans constructing new ideas and meanings based on new perspectives. The central research question guiding this study was: How did participation in a traditional teacher mentorship program in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia impact alternatively certified teachers' success? Thirteen alternatively certified teachers who participated in a traditional teacher mentorship program during their first year in the profession were chosen through purposeful criterion sampling. Data collection included document analysis/archival records, field notes/observations, and teacher interviews. Preliminary analysis, coding, cross-case synthesis, and naturalistic generalizations were used for data analysis.

*Key-words:* traditional and alternative certification, traditional mentorship program

**Copyright Page**

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents Roger and Kay, who were always there to provide encouragement throughout this process. You both taught my brother and I the value of hard work, which has served me well as both a professional and a doctoral student. Watching your work ethic in action was truly inspiring and motivating. I know I would not be where I am or who I am today without you. Love to both of you.

I also wish to dedicate this work to my brother Gene, sister-in-law Nicki, and three beautiful nieces Allie, Daphne, and Avery. They have always understood when I was not available because I was busy doing homework or working on my final dissertation process. I finished strong in part because I wanted to show my young nieces what hard work and dedication to a goal can provide upon completion. Love to all five of you.

This work is also dedicated to my departed grandmother Ruth, or “Granny” as she was known to all of us. I will never forget her asking me with a silly grin if I was crazy for going back to school. However, even in her disbelief, she supported me, up until her last time on this earth, by checking in on how it was going and inquiring about when I was ever going to finish. Love to you.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Advanced Placement (AP)

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA)

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

Timberlake County Public Schools (TCPS)

United States Department of Education (USDOE)

Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment (VCLA)

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Traditionally certified teachers are those who have graduated from an approved college or university teacher preparation program. Alternatively certified teachers are those who have not graduated from a traditional preparation program, but rather who have met the necessary state teacher certification pre-requisites required to obtain a provisional license to teach. These alternatively certified teachers then must complete whatever missing components they have been cited for by the state while they teach their first three years in a school system. The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program (created with traditionally certified teachers and their educational background in mind) on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district called Timberlake County Public Schools (TCPS) (pseudonym) in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. The problem that necessitated the research for this study was the lack of empirical qualitative research in understanding the benefit of a traditional mentorship program completed by alternatively certified teachers. This was based on an extensive literature search and review. The potential audiences for this research are those in the educational realm, specifically those leaders who create mentorship programs in school districts. This chapter highlights the background for this study, the situation to self of the researcher, the problem and purpose statements, the significance of the study, the research questions, and definitions of key terms. Knowles' adult learning theory and Mezirow's transformative learning theory provided the theoretical framework for this study.

### **Background**

Even in the preliminary stages of this research preparation, it was easy to see how the historical, social, and theoretical components were very closely related. The historical

background surrounding alternatively certified teachers and how they came to be teachers in the educational realm allowed one to understand the social implications of their preparation. Such social implications lead to the theoretical assumptions that school districts face today as they struggle to properly support new alternatively certified teachers.

### **Historical**

Year after year school systems around the United States struggle to obtain and retain fully certified teachers who are licensed to teach exactly what they are hired to teach (Green & Ballard, 2011). Many localities must rely on alternatively certified teachers to fill these positions. Alternatively certified teachers are those who have not completed a traditional college or university teacher preparation program (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). They have instead entered through an alternative route, which typically did not contain all the pre-employment components that their traditionally certified counterparts had at their disposal in college. These teachers enter the classroom with a disadvantage in that they have not experienced the same pre-entry courses, actual classroom experiences, and/or other useful requisites that their fully certified counterparts have (VDOE, 2018). Theoretically speaking, adults are able to self-direct and work independently from others in order to make up for what they lack in their education preparatory background (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). However, if mentorship programs were designed to serve alternatively certified teachers, as well as their traditionally certified counterparts, perhaps they may not struggle as much with establishing a teacher identity, gaining a sense of belonging, applying content knowledge, and transitioning from a traditional work setting to a classroom environment (Williams, 2010).

School systems have historically experienced and completed the necessary changes that

have been required of them in years past. Most public-school systems are bound by a constantly changing set of rules and regulations by which they must abide, many set forth by the introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Many of these systems have struggled to find highly qualified teachers who meet all the criteria set forth by this law (VDOE, 2018). Rural areas have struggled more than others, due to their typically smaller populations and factors such as high poverty levels (Abell, Collins, Kleinert, & Pennington, 2014). Because of this, states had to create regulations for hiring alternatively certified teachers, due to a lack of traditionally certified teachers who have completed and graduated from a full teacher preparation program (Brenner, Elder, Wimbish, & Walker, 2015). Alternatively certified teachers are those who have not completed an approved college or university teacher preparation program, but rather entered the teaching profession through some alternative manner, as set forth by their state's department of education (United States Department of Education, 2018).

Without realizing it, many of these teachers must utilize theoretical concepts such as adult learning theory, specifically transformative learning theory, to create their own realities in the classroom based on their experiences during their first-year mentorship phases (Brigham, 2011). Green and Ballard (2011) advocate the use of personal experiences to guide one's knowledge base, therefore extending the notion to those who feel underwhelmed by the specification of a mentorship program regarding their unique needs.

## **Social**

Working to find state defined, highly qualified, alternatively certified teachers has become the full-time duty of many human resources directors. In addition, at times, they are replacing these teachers as fast as they are hiring them, due in part to lack of preparation, lack of experience with children, and lack of internal supports (Brenner et al., 2015). The aftermath of



having to replace teachers who are not retained can lead to many frustrating days of planning mentorship programs that will assist in curbing this issue (Kutsyuruba, Godden, & Tregunna, 2014). This points out the need for constant inquiry into and reflection on both procedures and processes that surround teachers today (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010). Transforming ideas and their meanings into new perspectives, over time, encompasses Mezirow's (1995) ideas regarding the transformative learning theory.

### **Theoretical**

Research has been done on alternative certification, which is a timely topic for many school boards across America (Brenner et al., 2015). Some of this research points out that new teachers all come with varying levels of issues that need to be addressed at the time of mentorship during the induction period (Bell-Robertson, 2015). During this induction period, a new hire teacher spends vast amounts of time learning how to transition from a novice teacher to a more experienced one throughout the first year of employment. They attend in-services for specific training in certain areas, have mentors assigned to them, and begin to see what works and what does not work in the actual classroom. Lack of time has some principals resisting the hiring of alternatively certified teachers because these types of new hires often require additional time to support (Brenner et al., 2015).

Isolation, culture shock, feelings of failure, and many other negative connotations develop among alternatively certified teachers during their first year of teaching (Conway, 2015). A good mentorship program tailored to their specific deficiencies and needs might assist in closing the gap to negate these problems (Timberlake County Public Schools, 2018d). New teachers all desire certain things from their mentorship programs, but often it is difficult to know ahead of time what would be helpful in the classroom without first experiencing time with

students to see what might be helpful (Kidd, Brown, & Fitzallen, 2015).

Mentors are important assets to mentees, in addition to the activities and training that take place in the mentorship program phase (TCPS, 2018d). Groups of trained veteran teachers not only need to be assembled in school systems to reach out to all teachers, but also to extend additional help to those from alternatively certified paths (Abell et al., 2014). For these mentees to be best prepared, they need training as well, which is the responsibility of the districts (Ambrosetti, 2014). The relationships built between mentor and mentee are important to success in the classroom for these new teachers, therefore, much attention needs to be given to the pairing (Edwards-Groves, 2014).

In summary, this research extends the existing knowledge in this area of study by gaining an understanding of the impact of traditional mentorship programs on alternatively certified teachers during their induction periods as new hires. The research benefits new alternatively certified teachers in preparing them for future classroom experiences, which in turn benefits the students and parents. Finally, this proposed research adds to and expands upon the small body of existing literature by investigating and refining the widespread information regarding alternatively certified teachers who participated in a traditional mentorship program.

### **Situation to Self**

As a former licensure specialist for a public-school district, I watched many new teachers come and go. Often the ones that struggled the most were the alternatively certified teachers. They typically lacked student teaching, along with professional studies courses, which prepare aspiring teachers for the classroom. Traditional mentorship programs in school districts are designed for the majority, which are those who have graduated from traditional teacher preparation programs, therefore, requiring less guidance than alternatively certified new hires

(Teaching Degree, 2016). Many of these alternatively certified teachers feel lost in the process, and resign well before their traditionally licensed counterparts (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). I believe the restructuring of mentorship programs, specifically for those entering through the alternative routes, offering more support and varied experiences, would supplement what they lack at the onset. This will initiate a retention and tenure increase for that group. I still had access to this same school district, even though I no longer worked there, as I maintained a good relationship with the administration and many of the teachers. I worked from an epistemological philosophical assumption of knowing, based on a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm to guide the study, obtained through document analysis/archival records, field notes/observations, and teacher interviews (Creswell, 2013). This epistemological philosophical assumption was most appropriate above those of ontological, methodology, or axiological, since it surrounds the idea of knowledge being truth within certain limitations, such as those who enter the teaching profession through alternative routes (Creswell, 2013). This stands in opposition to others such as ontological assumptions since those relate to the nature of reality itself. Methodology assumptions focus more on the methods used in the research process. Axiological assumptions concentrate more on the role of values in research. Epistemology however, allows the researcher to get as close as possible to the participants being studied to utilize the subjective evidence gathered (Creswell, 2013). My essential role was to conduct research in an ethical and thorough manner to understand the impact of traditional mentorship programs on alternatively certified teachers (Creswell, 2013). The goal was to separate my own personal experiences and biases from this study in a professional manner.

## **Problem Statement**

At times principals are hesitant to hire alternatively certified teachers due to the lack of traditional teacher preparation they have experienced (Brenner et al., 2015; Edwards-Groves, 2014). Alternatively certified teachers also fear their lack of traditional teacher preparation may hinder their success (Brenner et al., 2015). Both the principals and the teachers are concerned that success may be far from reach due to the lack of preparedness levels at the onset of teaching (Brenner et al., 2015). For some alternatively certified teachers, they experience positive relationships with their mentor, which in turn helps shape them into effective teachers (Edwards-Groves, 2014). Alternatively certified teachers who have poor mentorship experiences leave the profession well before their traditionally prepared counterparts because they do not feel as prepared to be on their own in the classroom on a daily basis (Kidd et al., 2015). They often have varying levels of perceptions and score differently in survey areas such as confidence (Mathur, Gehrke, & Kim, 2012). Teachers may feel differently about their abilities to be good teachers once they have completed a mentorship program during their first year of teaching.

While there are many types of alternatively certified teachers, certain hard-to-fill subject areas elicit larger numbers of these new hires (VDOE, 2018). One such subject area is foreign language, which tends to include more alternatively certified teachers, therefore increasing the need for specialized mentorship programs to ensure more opportunity for success and retention (Kissau & King, 2015). In addition to foreign language, special education is a hard-to-fill area (VDOE, 2018). Special education teachers require a broad set of competencies that may not be gleaned from a basic introductory course that is required of an alternatively certified teacher in Virginia to get started in the special education teaching field (Abell et al., 2014). Ambrosetti (2014) emphasized the impact a mentor program can have on a mentee, based upon the prior

preparation and training involved. Kutsyuruba et al. (2014) directly support the need for further research of the type of induction into the profession versus the type of mentorship these teachers receive. The need exists for future studies, which can lead to specific support services tailored to alternatively certified teachers (Ricci & Zetlin, 2013). No qualitative studies were located that provide detailed impact data regarding participation in traditional mentorship programs that are completed by alternatively certified teachers. The information gleaned from the participants in these programs offers a glance into whether a second type of new hire mentorship program is needed to supplement any alternative route deficiencies.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia (Creswell, 2013). Alternatively certified teachers are understood as those who have not graduated from a traditional teacher preparation program, but instead have entered the profession through some type of alternative route, such as experiential learning (Certification Map, 2016). Traditionally certified teachers are those who have graduated from a traditional teacher preparation program (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016). The theories guiding this study included adult learning theory, made famous by Knowles, as it allows someone to utilize their experiential learning to construct their own meanings, which can overcome any drawbacks to not having a specifically designed mentorship program for alternatively certified teachers (Knowles, 1970). Another guiding framework, stemming from adult learning theory, was transformative learning theory, made famous by Mezirow (1995), as it allows someone to construct new ideas and meanings based on new perspectives.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to teacher preparation as it relates to the alternatively certified population of teachers. Theoretically speaking, many of these teachers are left to their own devices and must utilize specific concepts of adult learning theory, specifically the transformative learning theory. Both the adult learning theory and the transformative learning theory allow teachers to make up for what they lack by utilizing their circumstances and surroundings to construct their own personal learning (Green & Ballard, 2011). Empirically this study correlates well with other studies that have investigated varying levels of these issues, whereby teachers are left to their own devices to fill in the gaps of information they lack when hired through an alternative method of licensure, but by different approaches and through other lenses. Many results focus solely on teachers in general, combining those from both traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers together (Pogrund & Chrissy, 2013). None of the articles reviewed focused specifically on whether alternatively prepared teachers feel they need additional support in the new hire mentorship phase in comparison to their traditionally certified counterparts.

Practically speaking, this study is of importance to the Timberlake Public School District, (a pseudonym), due to the number of alternatively certified teachers in their workforce (TCPS, 2018c). A high turnover rate currently exists in this district for alternatively certified teachers, therefore, placing a natural emphasis, from the beginning, on the training and support during their mentorship program (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016). By studying the mentorship program completed by these alternatively certified teachers, there is a need to suggest the creation of an alternative mentorship program for them with additional supports built in to alleviate the missing resources and knowledge bases when they arrive on the first day of school.

A long-term goal will be for these additional supports to lead to greater satisfaction with the job, which in turn could translate into longer tenure for these individuals (Kidd et al., 2015). These qualities can support the district with hiring practices, as well as ultimately relate to higher success rates of children who have consistent teachers who become veterans over time (USDOE, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

Creating deep, rich research questions is important when designing a multiple case study (Creswell, 2013). These questions were framed based on the problem, as well as the purpose of the study, which in this case was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers. Based upon the abovementioned problem and purpose statements, the following research questions were created to guide this study through the creation of interview discussions with participants.

### **Central Question**

The following research question guided this study.

How did participation in a traditional teacher mentorship program in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia impact alternatively certified teachers' success?

This question was chosen as the broader overview of the mentorship program in which the alternatively certified teachers participated. Answers to this question highlight the overall impact the traditional mentorship program had on the participants and how these qualities impacted their success, by way of developing common themes. Many who have entered teaching through an alternative route experience varying levels of perceptions during their onboarding process into the profession (Mathur et al., 2012). Answering this central question therefore, allowed me to find the most common responses among the participants to gain a better

understanding of how the program worked and impacted the alternatively certified teachers' success.

### **Sub-Questions**

1. How did the participants describe the benefits of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?

This first sub-question allowed the researcher to explore the positive side of combining traditionally and alternatively certified teachers during the mentorship process. Many traditional mentorship programs offer benefits to both groups of participants, those from traditional and alternative routes to licensure. For example, one portion of the mentorship program relates to the relationship between an assigned mentor and the new teacher mentee. The program focuses on fostering a good working relationship between both mentor and mentee, allowing the new teacher to feel a sense of camaraderie, with someone to talk with in times of confusion or complication (Edwards-Groves, 2014).

2. How did the participants describe the challenges of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?

The second sub-question explored the challenges that alternatively certified teachers experienced because their mentorship program was not created with their unique needs in mind, regarding the lack of specific components present in traditional teacher preparation college or university programs. Only a small amount of literature separates the data into traditional versus alternative teacher results, which highlights deficiencies in traditional mentorship programs regarding preparing alternatively certified teachers (Pogrud & Chrissy, 2013). Focusing on these challenges lead to a list of items that may need to be adjusted and accounted for in the future creation of alternatively certified mentorship programs. This list includes things such as



trainings that include conversations normally had during the student teaching phase of a teacher's preparation, and in-services that brainstorm information that will be learned through professional studies courses over the next years of the provisional license (VDOE, 2018).

3. How did participation in a traditional mentorship program impact the participants' beliefs and assumptions of their classroom experiences?

The third and final sub-question allowed the information collected from participants to highlight any possible impact of the traditional mentorship program on alternatively certified teachers. Because a long-term goal of any school system is to retain the best teachers possible, requiring new hires to participate in effective mentorship programs which meet the needs of all involved is imperative (Kidd et al., 2015). This question highlights items that might be helpful to alter in the future to assist in meeting this goal.

### **Definitions**

1. *Alternatively Certified Teachers* – Teachers who have not graduated from an approved college or university teacher preparation program with a full teaching license; rather those who have earned a provisional teaching certification through some type of alternate route (i.e.: experiential learning, special education pre-requisite course, and others) and will need to fulfill the remaining requirements (i.e. professional studies courses such as teaching reading in the content areas, foundations of education, and classroom behavior management) while they are teaching (VDOE, 2018).
2. *Traditionally Certified Teachers* – Teachers who graduated from an approved college or university teacher preparation program with a full teaching license (VDOE, 2018).
3. *Traditional Mentorship Program* – Teacher induction programs created by the school districts in which a teacher is newly hired, requiring the teachers to participate in various

activities, seminars, trainings, and other activities deemed necessary to provide a smooth transition from new teacher to experienced teacher; typically mentorship programs are exactly the same for both traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers, with no distinctions between the two (i.e., additional support for the alternatively certified teacher who often lacks in preparation) (VDOE, 2018).

### **Summary**

Chapter One provides the background to this multiple case study, focusing on traditional mentorship programs participated in by alternatively certified teachers in Virginia. These alternatively certified teachers are mixed together with traditionally certified teachers with more valuable prior teaching experiences, leaving them at a disadvantage. The meaning of this study for myself is important to the field of education due to the desire to improve the opportunities for alternatively certified teachers to experience necessary trainings that will help fill the gap between them and other traditionally certified teachers. The problem of no studies being available to detail the impact of traditional mentorship programs completed by alternatively certified teachers necessitated the purpose of this study, which was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers. There are both empirical and practical significances to this study, as they relate to many stakeholders including teachers and students. The central research question and the three sub-questions shaped the conversations through the interviews with the teachers to delve into an understanding of the traditional mentorship program and its impact on alternatively certified teachers' success. The use of the words traditional and alternative refer to the overall pre-requisites used to prepare teachers.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers. This chapter highlights two theoretical frameworks, which guided the study along the way, while providing lenses for the research (Creswell, 2013). These two theoretical frameworks allowed the findings to be situated within their greater context of knowledge (Creswell, 2013). They are called adult learning theory and transformative learning theory. A thorough review of the literature was conducted to ground the study and demonstrate the need for this research (Creswell, 2013). This includes discussion of topics such as alternative licensure/certification, traditional mentorship programs, mentorship program positive and negative experiences, mentorship preparation and relationships, mentorship program outcomes, and filling the gap with alternative mentorship programs. A clear gap in the literature emerged through this literature review, which demonstrated the need for this type of research (Creswell, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Adult learning theory instructs that adults are both self-directed and plan to take responsibility for their own decisions (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). It also implies that adults can and desire to work independently of assistance from others (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970). There is a focus on experiential moments in time where adults use their circumstances and surroundings to construct their own learning (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). By applying their current knowledge and skills to the day-to-day tasks and events that occur during the school day, teachers can transform into as many new versions of themselves as they see fit, only grounded by their sheer imagination

(Chan, 2012). Knowles, Dewey, and Lindeman made this adult learning theory famous (as cited in Green & Ballard, 2011). There are several reappearing constructs of reflective thoughts, self-directed learners and teachers, and experiences apparent in adult learning theory (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Parker, Robinson, & Hannafin, 2008). This theory advances the topic literature by allowing readers to understand that teachers will often do whatever it takes, regardless of the amount of assistance they have, to succeed by working through their specific new hire issues during the inductive mentorship period (Green & Ballard, 2011). This proposed study presents itself as a possible advancement of theory, through research, by extending the notion of using personal experiences to guide one's knowledge base growth while participating in a mentorship program (Green & Ballard, 2011; Parker et al., 2008).

A specific branch of adult learning theory includes transformative learning theory. This theory was first explored as Mezirow (1997) was conducting a study that examined the experiences of women returning to college or the work force after varying periods of time. His findings included personal transformations that had occurred in the participants as they began their new experiences (Mezirow, 1997). This theory allows one to change ideas and meanings to new perspectives over time (Brigham, 2011; Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015; Mezirow, 1995). It allows one to challenge the intellectual schema to bring about change (Brigham, 2011; Mezirow, 1995). By examining their embedded beliefs with new experiences, over time, a naturalistic change takes place for learners such as teachers (Poutiatine & Connors, 2012). This process is typically triggered through major life events and requires proper reflection to completely take place (Brigham, 2011; Christie et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1995). Mezirow made transformative learning theory famous (Brigham, 2011). Reappearing constructs of this theory include Humanism, meaning perspectives, and meaning schemes (Brigham, 2011;

Mezirow, 1995). It advances the topic of literature by underpinning the understanding that educators can change ideas about teaching based on what they experience in their mentorship programs regarding areas such as classroom management, specific abilities, and more (Brigham, 2011). This study advanced this theory through research by utilizing reflection as a tool to mark changes over time, emphasizing positive and negative aspects of mentorship programs (Brigham, 2011). Similar to Mezirow's transformative theory, is Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, whereby humans expand their knowledge base over time based on their actual experiences. Chan (2012) supports this method of learning as well, based on the facts that at all ages' various experiences are accepted into the schema of life for an individual, therefore molding them into differing versions of themselves.

Both the adult learning theory and the transformative learning theory pair well to illuminate the topic of teacher mentorship. Just as children learn through experiences, such as when they learned to talk by hearing multiple voices speak over time, adults too incorporate knowledge based on what happens in their lives (Knowles, 1970; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). This natural method of educating oneself spans over years and years of experiences and opportunities, allowing the adult to focus on what works and what does not, adjusting when necessary (Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). New teacher mentorship programs are just one catalyst for this style of learning. These programs incorporate collaborative components such as the use of mentors and professional development activities in groups alongside fellow teachers to solidify the idea of both learning through experiences and transforming ideas and beliefs over time (TCPS, 2018bd). Using a well-crafted mentorship program, Mezirow's (1995) transformative theory is at work while career switcher teachers achieve their own success utilizing an active pursuit of their work's meaning, critically assessing all of their current assumptions before

making decisions, actively and thoughtfully planning daily, and attempting an unfamiliar situation such as teaching (Snyder, Oliveira, & Paska, 2013).

Teachers can shape both the minds and entire lives of the students they educate. If along the way they too are inspired to learn new things through an adult learning transformative manner, then there is simply an additional positive outcome to the profession (Brigham, 2011; Mezirow, 1995). Many teachers never stop learning, as they continue their education for teacher licensure renewal purposes or advanced degrees, as well as through day-to-day interactions, which enrich their lives (Teaching Degree, 2016). Most of them are open to change, which in turn, allows for growth and renewal of its own. School districts around the country strive to be the best and demonstrate it with test scores and numbers of Ivy League university entrants from their schools (TCPS, 2018b). The beginning of all this success is rooted however in the introductory stages of their new hire teachers as they begin to teach and nurture the future of this country. The below related literature serves to illustrate how mentorship programs can be the catalyst that make all this happen and make America's students the best they can be.

### **Related Literature**

After an extensive literature review, several themes emerged that allowed me to categorize information. First, I explain alternative licensure/certification in detail. This allows the reader to have a better understanding of what these words mean, as they are not common language utilized in day-to-day conversation. I then lead into a discussion of traditional mentorship programs that outline how they work and what is expected or assumed of alternatively certified teachers who participate. Next there is a discussion of both the positive and negative experiences of teachers as they progress through traditional mentorship programs. Following this section, mentorship preparation on the part of both the mentors and the mentees is

explored, along with the nature of relationships that are formed between both types of participants in these programs. Mentorship program outcomes are then introduced, as they relate to the traditional mentorship programs completed by alternatively certified teachers. Finally, information is shared regarding the concept of filling the gap with alternative mentorship programs for those not graduating from traditional teacher preparation programs.

### **Alternative Licensure/Certification**

Alternative licensure/certification in the realm of education, while not a new concept to school systems in the United States, is certainly a new concept to the average teacher or other American citizen. Unless a candidate has gone through an alternative certification process to become a teacher, it is a relatively unknown concept and process. The definition of alternative certification is when someone enters the teaching profession through methods other than a traditional college or university teacher preparation program (USDOE 2018). Barclay, Stoltz, and Chung (2011) report that voluntary midlife career changes, such as joining the teacher workforce after years of working in another field, is more common during middle adulthood between the ages of 35 and 65. Many adults nearing midlife aspire to become involved in a profession that will allow them to feel more fulfilled and helpful to the human race (Barclay et al., 2011). The future outcome of the new-found satisfaction they seek will be based on the varying levels of professional engagement they take advantage of as well as their own inner career development aspirations when they enter the classroom (Eren, 2012). These career changers are embarking on a “unique professional experience” (Gifford, Snyder, & Cuddapah, 2013, p. 50) where they are thrust into completely new situations.

Alternative licensure/certification became necessary due to the lack of qualified applicants in many areas of the United States (Brenner et al., 2015). The United States is not the

only country affected by the shortages however. Multiple countries also struggle with these shortages and are constantly working to figure out a plan that will solve the issue (Eren, 2012). Particularly this shortage affected the need for special education teachers, who have always been more difficult to find in comparison to content area candidates (Teaching Certification, 2017). For example, in Virginia, special education is one of the most common alternative licensure options due to the high number of vacancies available from year to year (Teaching Certification, 2017). Teachers who wish to enter the profession through an alternative manner often turn to special education due to the high need and the increase in their chances to obtain employment through this option. Once the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) became law, many states were faced with a shortage of qualified teachers according to the standards set forth in the Act (USDOE, 2018). Stringent requirements were put in place due to this, which did not exist prior to the new law (USDOE, 2018). Prior to the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), public school districts were able to be extremely flexible in choosing teachers to fill positions. Rigorous standards requirements had to be met, such as testing, professional studies, specific amounts and types of content coursework, and student teaching (Brenner et al., 2015). In turn, alterations to the way colleges and universities structured their teacher preparation programs to meet these needs were under way (Brenner et al., 2015). The VDOE (2018) was then forced to work with the United States Department of Education for approval on state plans that allows them to recruit qualified individuals based on certain pre-requisites, and train them on the job to become certified teachers. Although these rules and regulations must be the guiding factor in the set-up of teacher licensure, one must always remember that motivation to teach is highly important as these often second career candidates move from practitioners to teachers (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012).



The following are examples of Virginia alternative licensure methods. Each state has its own list of alternative methods, which are typically available on their Department of Education website under the teacher licensure section. Each state must have their alternative methods approved by the United States Department of Education prior to implementing them (USDOE, 2018). Regardless of through which routes these career changers enter the field, there will be themes that emerge concerning learning and teaching that are often tied to their background which must be explored, discussed, and analyzed to benefit both the teachers and the students (Tigchelaar, Vermunt, & Brouwer, 2012).

A multitude of alternative entry methods such as experiential routes to learning, special education provisional licensure, content provisional licensure, satisfying endorsement course options, and Career Switcher Program routes, entered the educational realm in the state of Virginia (VDOE, 2018). Each of the abovementioned methods requires less than the completion of a full teacher preparation program through an accredited college or university, where the student graduates with a full renewable teaching license. Ultimately though, each of the alternative routes lack one of the most important and beneficial components that is gained in a traditional experience, which is student teaching (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016; VDOE, 2018). The student can then culminate one's learning experiences from coursework with a placement in an actual classroom performing 300 hours or more of teaching alongside an experienced mentor teacher (Education Degree, 2017). Student teachers are then allowed to both observe the mentor teacher, advance to doing the actual teaching while being observed by the mentor, then ultimately be left alone to take over the class in its entirety by the end of the 300-hour experience (Education Degree, 2017). As a valuable experience, this allows student teachers to know realistically what to expect when stepping into their own classrooms someday.

For the alternatively certified teachers, they are basically receiving on the job training as they are thrust into the classroom without having completed true college or university sponsored student teaching as described above (Ingersoll, 2012).

One of the alternate routes to licensure in Virginia without this student teaching experience is the experiential route to licensure (Certification Map, 2016). Through this option, individuals are required to have a four-year college degree, and at least five full-time years of experience in any field other than teaching, including occupations such as a stay-at-home mom, an instructional assistant, and others. If they meet these criteria, they must then take a Praxis II content area test in the field in which they want to teach, such as math. If the candidate passes the teacher assessment test and provides proof of the degree and work experience time, a school district can apply for a provisional license, which allows them to begin teaching right away in the content area for which the test was passed (Certification Map, 2016). Once the licensure is obtained by the school district, the teacher then must teach at least one full-time year under the provisional license to satisfy the missing student teaching component. The person must also take whatever professional studies courses are required for the content area. These courses are those that “teach the person how to teach.” They include topics such as curriculum and instructional procedures, classroom and behavior management, foundations of education, human growth and development, and reading (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016). The provisional license is good for a three-year period, and these professional studies must be completed by the culmination of that time. The teacher is also required to take and pass any additional testing requirements in the VDOE (2018) regulations at that time for their subject area during this three-year period. The experiential route to licensure is not an option for anyone going into special education or elementary education (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016).

Another alternative to a traditional teacher preparation program is a special education provisional licensure method. Anyone with a four-year degree who enrolls in and passes a legal aspects and methods course, that is part of a special education degree program at a college or university, can obtain this type of licensure (Special Education Guide, 2017). Once these two requirements are met, the school district can then apply for the provisional license on the prospective teachers' behalf and hire them to teach special education right away. The district must assign the teacher a specific special education mentor with experience in the field (VDOE, 2018). The teacher must then agree to complete the remainder of the special education courses through the college or university program of choice within the three-year period of the license. The teacher is also required to take and pass any additional testing requirements in the VDOE (2018) regulations at that time for special education during this three-year period. Again, the teacher must teach at least one full-time year under this license to satisfy the missing student teaching component (Special Education Guide, 2017).

There is also a content provisional licensure option that requires an aspiring teacher to hold a four-year degree in a content area, such as English (Teaching Degree, 2016). If a person meets this requirement, the district can then apply for a provisional license in the content area for which the degree is in and allow the teacher to begin right away (Teaching Degree, 2016). Certain subjects based on specificity, special education and elementary education, do not apply to this option. The teacher must agree to complete the professional studies required for that content area within the three-year period of the provisional license, as well as complete at least one full-time year of teaching to satisfy the missing student teaching component. The teacher is also required to take and pass any additional testing requirements in the VDOE (2018) regulations at that time for the subject area during this three-year period.

Like the content provisional licensure option above, a person who holds a four-year college degree and who has taken the coursework for a specific teaching content area, such as biology, as outlined by the VDOE (2018), will also be eligible for a provisional license if a school district chooses to hire them. Special education and elementary education licensure seekers are not eligible for this option (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016). The teacher must agree to complete the professional studies required for that content area within the three-year period of the provisional license, as well as complete at least one full-time year of teaching to satisfy the missing student teaching component. The teacher is also required to take and pass any additional testing requirements in the VDOE (2018) regulations at that time for the subject area during this three-year period.

One final alternative option to licensure in Virginia is called a Career Switcher Program (Education Degree, 2017). This option is available to various PK-12 teaching endorsements, except for special education. This program tends to be very popular with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) professionals who decide to make a career switch, which allows for an influx of science and math teachers into the profession (Grier & Johnston, 2012). Career Switcher Programs run through various institutions of higher learning throughout the state (USDOE, 2018). Pre-requisites include applying to the institution of choice, holding a four-year college degree, completion of specific content courses in a teaching area or the equivalent through verifiable experience or academic study, at least five full-time years of work experience or its equivalent, and passing scores on the chosen content Praxis II test in Virginia (VDOE, 2018). Differing from the abovementioned options, this program does offer a much-abbreviated version of student teaching before the person is eligible for licensure. Students mainly observe for a couple of weeks in actual classroom settings (Teaching Certification, 2017). If a district

chooses to hire teachers with this type of licensure, it is only good for a one-year period. The district must then verify to the state that the new hire successfully completed their first year of teaching under this license to obtain a full five-year renewable license. It may be extended up to one additional school year if the district is unsure at the end of the first year (Education Degree, 2017).

### **Traditional Mentorship Programs**

Traditional mentorship programs exist as a valuable tool to assist new hire teachers with acclimating themselves to the profession, involving multiple stakeholders such as teachers, mentors, and administrators (Zembytska, 2016). They “serve to bridge the transition from pre-service to in-service teaching” (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009, p. 703). School districts are tasked with creating their own mentorship programs for these new teachers. There are always challenges with program design and operation during both the creation and implementation of such programs (Bullough, 2012). Even school districts with complex mentorship programs in place continue to struggle with questions and problems as they grow and re-evaluate annually (Childre, 2014). Each district has a specific plan, often available in written form that specifically outlines the first years of employment in their system as a new teacher. Timberlake County Public Schools (2018d) has such a document posted on their website outlining the overall purpose of their mentor program, which “is to provide support for beginning teachers and new teachers to Timberlake County” (p. 2). This program utilizes a tiered approach to mentoring. First a retired teacher from the school system is assigned to the new hire. This retiree meets with the new hire either on a regularly scheduled date each week or month, or on an as needed basis, depending on the situation. The retiree may or may not have taught in the same school as the new hire, but still has a working knowledge of the school system and assists with

overall teaching issues (TCPS, 2018d). Each teacher also has a building level mentor, typically and preferably in their same content area, such as English, special education, and others. This experienced teacher serves as a go to person within the school who can assist with day-to-day issues that arise. This person is well versed in the inner workings of the school of the new hire, which is extremely beneficial due to the subtle differences in the way things are handled from school to school (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). A third layer consists of a central administration office mentor who is assigned to the teacher. This person holds a high-level position at the administration level who makes occasional stops by the school to check in on the new teacher, and who can also be of assistance by phone or more frequent visits based on teacher need. This mentor is particularly important when questions arise regarding policy and other formal matters. They are also extremely useful when new teachers need resources the school does not already have in its possession (Mathur et al., 2012). Finally, a fourth possible mentor is a coach that might be assigned on an as needed basis if the new hire is struggling with any areas of teaching. This mentor can focus in on the new hire teacher's weaknesses to assist them in being successful despite problems that arise (Mathur et al., 2012). These mentors are typically assigned for the first year only of the new hire's career. However, extensions can be made based on individual needs and principal recommendations (TCPS, 2018d).

In addition to the tiered approach to direct mentors assigned to the new hire teachers, there are also several other components that exist in most districts. Timberlake utilizes components such as specific professional development activities/meetings that all new hire teachers must attend. These meetings cover topics ranging from the simpler tasks of record keeping to the most difficult of classroom behavior management. These activities/meetings are opportunities for additional training past their college or university teacher program preparation

(Ambrosetti, 2014). Many of these activities/meetings assume that all teachers have graduated from a traditional college or university teacher preparation program. This can cause issues for the alternatively certified teachers as they do not have the same background knowledge; therefore, they are not always on an equal playing field with the traditionally certified teachers.

Another important component Timberlake utilizes for new hire teachers during the mentorship period is perhaps one of the most valuable. This is the new hire orientation meeting that is held each summer, the week before school starts for the teachers (TCPS, 2018d). During this orientation meeting, new hire teachers all come together as one large group, making it possible for them to form relationships, particularly with those they meet from their new school (Ambrosetti, 2014). The first three tiers of their mentors are also invited to the meeting, including the retiree, the building level teacher, and the central administration office mentor. This gives them a chance to meet and get to know these people as well before ever stepping foot in their school building (Goering, 2013). In addition to the relationships new hires can form on that day, they are also presented with a wealth of information that will assist them not only with the day-to-day aspects of teaching, such as special education inclusion, teacher licensure, and other important topics, but also helps them understand the human resources perspectives of their jobs, such as their benefits and necessary payroll paperwork (TCPS, 2018d).

Many school districts strive to create the most effective and efficient mentorship programs for their new hire teachers. They understand these types of programs can possibly assist them with maintaining more positive retention figures in the long run (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). A well-trained teacher is one who is more likely to remain in the profession longer, therefore, benefiting all parties involved, including the school district, the school itself, the administration, the teachers in general, the parents, and the students. This means there must be a

focus on what is important such as recruitment, retention, support, and an investment from all stakeholders involved- from teachers, to administration, to the school board (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Each state must attend to these needs according to their own laws, while managing to work within the guidelines of the United States Department of Education (Goldrick, Osta, Barlin, & Burn, 2012). There will always exist a virtual race to the top style of competition between states which allows for a constant stream of improvement measures, thus ensuring non-complacency (Goldrick, Osta, & Maddock, 2010).

Several themes emerge from these traditional types of mentorship programs for new hires. The first is that of assigned and unassigned mentors (Hellsten et al., 2009). Many districts, as demonstrated above, assign specific mentors to the new hire teachers. For the administrators who assign these individuals, much thought and effort go into the process, as the mentors often require additional training prior to being assigned to the new teachers. These mentors play a large role in shaping their mentees, therefore, those with many roles within the school building often expect more from their protégés (Bowser, Hux, McBride, Nichols, & Nichols, 2014). While the assigned mentors are an asset to the new hire, naturally occurring unassigned mentors can also be of assistance in surviving that first year and thereafter (Hellsten et al., 2009). These are often relationships that form between experienced and novice teachers simply due to circumstances such as physical proximity in their building, common interests between the two, and subject matter commonality. Although these mentors are not serving in an official capacity to assist the new teachers, they are certainly an asset not to be overlooked (Hellsten et al., 2009).

A second theme that emerges from traditional mentorship programs involves the idea of engaged versus disengaged mentors (Hellsten et al., 2009). Regardless of how much training a



mentor teacher experiences, there must be active engagement between the mentor and the mentee for success to be an option. Inquiry is a key component that a good mentor must introduce into a new teacher's life from the onset (Fowler, 2012). Allowing a new teacher to question and investigate the process is a way to introduce new methods of classroom practices that will ultimately benefit the students (Fowler, 2012). At no time can a mentor sit back and wait for the new teacher to come to the door asking for help. Many new teachers feel internal pressure to do a good job, without the assistance of others, therefore, causing them to withdraw and want to handle situations on their own (Hellsten et al., 2009). It is imperative that mentor teachers reach out on a scheduled basis to ensure the new hire receives adequate support and guidance along the way, particularly in that first year. A disengaged mentor will be of little value to the new hire. Typically, trust is built over time, while two people engage in ongoing dialogue and opinion sharing. This is not possible if the mentor is disengaged, nor if the mentee is disengaged (Fowler, 2012).

Finally, a third emerging theme from traditional mentorship programs involves single versus multiple mentors (Hellsten et al., 2009). There are arguments that exist in favor of both angles. Some concur that a single mentor allows for more consistent training and support from one person across the board (Kuzle & Biehler, 2015). This concept allows two teachers, the mentor and the mentee, to form a special bond due to the constant contact and support between one another. A solid relationship may arise that transcends over time into a lasting practice of collaboration between the two parties. There are others who agree that the presence of multiple mentors allows for a variety of teaching styles to enter, giving new teachers the chance to try new things from the various suggestions (Hellsten et al., 2009). School districts must choose what they see as best for both the mentors and the mentees. It appears that overall, most of them

choose multiple mentors as their preferred method, just as has been done in the Timberlake County Public Schools (2018d).

Ultimately, mentoring is about creating and maintaining meaningful relationships that focus on the quality of both the relationship itself, as well as the teaching aspect of the new hire (Bowser et al., 2014; Hellsten et al., 2009). Teacher self-efficacy is important to examine, for both mentors and mentees. Both groups need to have a positive outlook on their teaching career in order to survive the often overwhelming task of educating the world's youth (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014; Malanson, Jacque, Faux, & Meiri, 2014). There is certainly room for both the mentor and the mentee to grow throughout these relationships and beyond. At no time should one underestimate the power of a traditional mentorship program in response to many of the larger issues of being an educator.

### **Mentorship Program Positive and Negative Experiences**

Once a new hire teacher officially begins employment with a district, the mentorship program activities are set into motion. As the abovementioned activities progress, there are both positive and negative experiences of alternatively certified teachers who progress through traditional new hire mentorship programs. At the end of mentorship programs for new teachers, there are often both positive and negative responses to their experiences, which do not match up with the thoughts of mentors and administrators (Langdon et al., 2016). Because many of these teachers leave within their first five years of employment, attention needs to be paid to making sure the lack of initial preparation in curriculum development, co-teaching special education students in the regular education classroom, and general behavior management does not become a barrier to retention (Gifford et al., 2013). For the purposes of this study, a traditional program was the only type that existed, not considering the special additional needs of the alternatively

certified group. The concept of a traditional new hire mentorship program is based on the idea that alternatively certified teachers experience an exact replica of their new hire mentorship program, as do those who enter the teaching profession through traditional college or university teacher preparation programs (USDOE 2018). This can lead to both the positive and negative outcomes of such programs.

Many alternatively certified teachers experience the positive aspects of these traditional mentorship programs through general arenas such as teacher development and growth (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). Regardless of one's preparatory background in teaching, any well-designed and implemented professional development is going to be a catalyst for improvement. Truly thoughtful professional development is based on teacher needs, not just on fulfilling a requirement of school law or policy (Burkman, 2012). There is also the positive outcome of socializing with other teachers who have experienced traditional teacher preparation programs who can share information and knowledge not yet internalized by the alternatively certified counterpart. Blending the two groups together will form a co-learning environment, benefiting both groups of teachers, similar in concept to the idea of inclusion in the classroom with regular education and special education being mixed together for similar reasons (Ambrosetti, 2014). The concept of forming bonds with people on a social level is also a positive outcome for both traditional and alternatively certified teachers. These bonds allow for a more positive atmosphere for the new teacher because one feels like a part of a team, regardless of how well prepared the person is. Also, learning from others is a valuable tool that is not dependent solely on background knowledge.

The value of a good mentorship program is difficult to put into words; therefore, it must be placed in a position of the utmost importance in a school system to emphasize this to both the

novice and experienced teachers (Fowler, 2012). After all, the effectiveness of a teacher is directly related to student performance, rendering the quality of mentorship programs a topic that simply cannot be ignored (Block, Crochet, Jones, & Papa, 2012). Although teachers are the main variable in student success, all stakeholders such as students, parents, school boards, and others play a significant role in ensuring quality education (Bright, 2012). Even new innovative virtual mentorship programs between the building locations of school districts have proven beneficial, just as much as the face-to-face versions that are often difficult to coordinate (Malanson et al., 2014). Perhaps one of the best ways to think of a positive outcome from a well-designed mentorship program is regarding the concept of true collaboration. This premise allows everyone involved, from the new teacher, to the mentor, to the administrators who coordinate the pair from the beginning, to work together to ensure a successful relationship, which in turn leads to the best development possible of a novice teacher to an experienced teacher (McCroskey, Teven, Minielli, & Richmond McCroskey, 2014). Along with this collaboration method, support will flow to the new hire from the mentor/mentee relationship, which will in turn lead to more positive outcomes for the novice teacher (Mitchell et al., 2013). This positive outcome from a mentorship program leads to feelings of self-confidence that can open the new hire up to a world of other opportunities.

While the positive outcomes of utilizing traditional mentorship programs to train new hire, alternatively certified teachers might be helpful, there are often negative experiences during the programs that lead to issues for those teachers. For example, these teachers often report a feeling of isolation due to varying experiences from traditional versus alternative certification methods (Conway, 2015). They feel behind from the beginning, therefore, feeling defeated before they really get a chance to get started and catch up with the rest of the new hire group

(Conway, 2015). Traditional college and university teacher preparation programs incorporate courses that teach fundamental techniques for the classroom that to some appear unnecessary. For example, when a new hire walks in the classroom, it is often assumed that children will sit quietly and listen to every word that comes out of the teacher's mouth. On the contrary, this typically does not happen right away. Children like to test their teachers and = need boundaries to be set for them from the beginning. Teacher preparation courses focus days on basic topics such as rule setting, something an alternatively certified teacher may never have given a second thought to prior to starting their first school year. Lacking multiple pieces of knowledge, like this example, is a reason why traditional mentorship programs are not always successful for the alternatively certified new hires. It is possible that these teachers need additional training in how to handle situations such as this, outside their normal activities in which they participate alongside their traditionally certified new hire counterparts. School districts must be more mindful of the needs of alternatively certified teachers, as they require a level of support that may differ from traditionally certified teachers (Grier & Johnston, 2012). Actually, an overall network of support is necessary to retain them, which requires a group effort between all stakeholders involved (Gujarati, 2012). Resources such as staff, time, funding, technology, and materials are necessary, many of which can be difficult to come by in many of today's school districts (Killion & Hirsh, 2013).

Feelings of isolation also come into play when alternatively certified teachers feel as though they are not part of the team of new hires. This can be exacerbated by personal situations as well when someone is dealing with their own issues and trying to do their daily job at the same time. They might also struggle with the thought of caregiving regarding their students, which can be a new experience for some teachers (Friesen & Besley, 2013). They attend

trainings with their traditionally certified counterparts, all the while noticing how many things they are not aware of that the others are (Conway, 2015). This causes them to feel inferior to the traditionally certified teachers, and leads to feelings of isolation that place them in a whole other category in their minds (Conway, 2015). The collegiality no longer exists for them, leaving them to feel alone and without resources to assist with their needs (O'Connor, Malow, & Bisland, 2011). Having supplemental support through an alternative mentorship program helps with this issue between these teachers and the traditionally prepared ones. Common planning times with mentors and release time to observe other successful teachers are tweaks that can help alleviate some of these negative aspects (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Additional training specifically tailored to alternatively certified teachers might allow for them to learn some of the important aspects they missed out on by not completing a college or university preparation program. This includes things such as classroom behavior management and curriculum and instructional design and procedures (Teaching Degree, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, many of the professional development activities assume a basic level of knowledge the new hire gained in a traditional college or university teacher preparation program. This is simply not the case for the alternatively certified teacher. Building a level of an adaptive or alternative mentorship strategy will assist in closing the gap between what the traditionally certified and the alternatively certified teachers already know (Salm & Mulholland, 2015). These types of strategies are often used with pre-service teachers who are a part of traditional preparation programs but will certainly add credence to the mentorship programs for alternatively certified teachers as well (Ralph & Walker, 2014). Focus needs to be placed on both the new hire's competence and confidence levels. Many alternatively certified teachers are simply expected to have high levels of both competence and confidence, just as traditionally

certified teachers, leaving them feeling isolated and left out of things that take place (Ralph & Walker, 2014). Monitoring the match between teachers and their professional development opportunities and requirements can help ensure good results that will allow them to flourish in the classroom by teaching them useful and practical ideas to try (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2012a). These courses, classes, and in-services need to reflect job-embedded materials, strategies, and suggestions, as opposed to random topics or activities that do not fit the culture of a school (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2012b).

Collaboration between mentors and mentees is vital to a successful mentorship program. Therefore, it is imperative that mentor teachers understand the special needs an alternatively certified teacher brings to the table. This need places emphasis on the specialized training that must be required of mentor teachers for them to successfully assist their new hire counterparts (O'Conner et al., 2011). If a mentor is not familiar with the alternatively certified teacher, it is difficult to understand why the mentee is not grasping a concept or not able to control the classroom. Many mentor teachers have been in the classroom for years before they are chosen to work with a new hire. It is difficult for them to remember exactly what they learned in their college or university teacher preparation program prior to entering the classroom on their own. Allowing for specific refresher information helps them understand exactly what the alternatively licensed mentee they are about to work with most likely has not been exposed to prior to beginning employment. Not being able to empathize with someone can often lead to difficult and strained interactions that crossover into frustration and then ultimately disengagement. This type of disconnect is exactly what should not happen between a mentor and mentee. Constant communication and the exchange of ideas and opinions must continue if there is to be a successful relationship built between the two (O'Connor et al., 2011). The impact of not being

able to work with others, such as mentors, can lead to negative responses by new hire teachers, therefore monitoring the mentor/mentee component is paramount (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2016). Although it is impossible to predict whether all mentor/mentee relationships will run smoothly, it can at least be a goal in the overall strategy utilized in creating well-crafted mentorship programs (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013).

### **Mentorship Preparation and Relationships**

Common sense dictates principals choose experienced teachers to serve as mentors for new hires each school year, as those new to the profession need special monitoring during those first years (Burkman, 2012). While in theory this is good practice, it poses an issue regarding alternatively certified new hires and their pairing with an experienced mentor. Because alternative certification is not widely understood as a general practice, many experienced teachers have been around the profession for years, well beyond 2001 when the new laws went into effect on teacher certification protocol (NCLBA, 2002). Mentors need to be educated on how alternatively certified teachers enter today's workforce so they have an understanding of how to better establish a good working relationship that will benefit both parties (Abell et al., 2014).

Many school systems even attempt to prepare their experienced mentor teachers by requiring them to complete mentor training which the district develops or allows a local college or university to offer (Teacher Certification Degrees, 2016). Just as other professions do as well, these programs become a mentor training the trainer type of event (O'Brien, Broom, & Ullah, 2015). This type of training style offers an opportunity to share styles of teaching, what works and what does not work, and classroom ideas that can be most helpful to a new teacher. However, most of these programs are in preparation for a traditional college or university teacher



candidate who is going to be doing pre-service student teaching. It still does not account for alternatively certified teachers who will be assigned a mentor once they have already begun a teaching contract. Timberlake County Public Schools utilizes an in-house version of this type of training as well, where they pair with a local university. It is a requirement that any experienced teacher who wishes to have their name on the list of those who might possibly be assigned to supervise a student teacher from a college or university must complete a pre-requisite training class. However, no mention of how to handle in-service, new hire, alternatively certified teachers typically takes place during this training (TCPS, 2018c).

Many schools of thought are now focusing on specific professional development courses targeted for the mentor teachers to be able to deepen their professional knowledge of teaching (Kuzle & Biehler, 2015). Incorporating pre-requisite skills for assisting the alternatively certified teachers is a simple addition to the skill sets they walk away with from these trainings, in addition to the normal professional development protocols. Most people are willing to learn new things, if they are presented in a meaningful and helpful way. Understanding personal attributes, system requirements, and logistics, pedagogical knowledge required, modeling, and feedback options on the part of the mentors can assist them in structuring their support in a way that will benefit both participants (Bird, 2012; Gilles, Carillo, Wang, Stegall, Bumgarner, 2013).

Another important component to the mentor/mentee relationship is regarding the preparation of the new alternatively certified teacher. Any new teacher traverses multiple phases during those first years, from novice to experienced, and hopefully one day to master educator (Moir, 2011). Drawing from a vast array of backgrounds and general teaching knowledge of these new teachers, each one will enter the profession with extremely different information bases (Certification Map, 2016). They also enter with very different learning styles, which requires a

common pedagogy for the art of teaching, best taught by experienced teachers (O'Toole & Essex, 2012). However, no matter what, there are extreme benefits of such a pairing if special attention is paid to the details of the relationship, therefore, making the planning process of the utmost importance (Ambrosetti, 2014). There is much that a new teacher, particularly an alternatively certified one, can learn from this relationship, making it paramount as one of the top components to the entire new hire mentorship program.

Effective mentors share certain qualities across the board: they listen and advise, they ask reflective questions rather than always simply giving answers, they maintain frequent contact with the mentee by initiating the communication, and they provide encouragement, empathy, and support (Bowser et al., 2014). One-on-one interactions and professional conversations between mentors and mentees build relationships that will last a lifetime, and which will also assist teachers, both traditionally and alternatively certified, to feel part of a team (Fowler, 2012). Feeling as though one is part of a team can generate a multitude of benefits that elicits a trickle-down effect from administrators to teachers, and teachers to students. When teachers feel as though they are supported by others, mentors and colleagues in general, they feel enough confidence to branch out and try new things, allowing them to expand their classroom repertoires.

Often the sheer years of experience of a mentor teacher dictate the administrative desire for them to serve alongside a new hire mentee (Pogodzinski, 2015). This experience typically translates into good leadership skills for the potential mentor, which in turn benefits the new teacher. However, many times these mentors have already committed to multiple assignments within the school, stretching them too thin, well before they take on a mentee (Goering, 2013). There is a natural phenomenon that occurs when a teacher does a good job for the school.

Administrative staffs often call on those teachers to take on multiple tasks because they know there is a reputation for doing a good job when assigned to things such as special projects, sponsoring certain clubs or supplemental daily activities, and working as sponsors for things such as the yearbook committee, or for coaching. While this is flattering that administration feels one can be trusted to do a good job when called upon, it also causes good teachers to become overwhelmed, thereby not producing the same quality of outcomes due to the overwhelming demands placed on them (Goering, 2013). All this information supports the fact that simple past traditions and arrangements made based only on site specific geography cannot be the sole factors in placement of mentors with prospective mentees (Pennanen, Bristol, Wilkinson, & Heikkinen, 2016).

Clearly the preparation of a mentor and the outcome of the relationship which is built between the mentor and the mentee are closely related. There must be a collaboration of both interpersonal and technical aspects of the relationship for a true gain in both knowledge and style of the new teacher (Wang & Fulton, 2012). Monitoring the interpersonal aspect of these relationships is necessary to reduce tensions of new teachers over time, while allowing them to acclimate themselves into their current school culture as they feel appropriate (Pillen, Brok, & Beijaard, 2013). Allowing for alternative preparation methods of mentors along with the natural aspect of interpersonal growth, one can forge a relationship that transcends day-to-day minutia with which a teacher must contend. Conversations must be had, ideas and opinions must be shared, and overall reflection on the part of both the mentor and the mentee must all collaborate to form the ultimate goal of a successful mentor relationship (Edwards-Groves, 2014). It is, however, important to consider that mentoring frequency is less important than mentoring quality. Good quality mentorship reduces emotional exhaustion, as well as paves the way for a

lasting effect on a teacher that will open many doors as the years progress (Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Anders, & Baumert, 2013). This relationship spills over into the classroom, which in turn benefits the students, the school, and the district.

One can even look at the mentor/mentee relationship as a type of successful peer influence, pending good prior training of the mentor of course (Wang & Fulton, 2012). Perceptions of classroom practices, for example, vary from teacher to teacher (Mathur et al., 2012). What one first grade teacher feels is a good idea for teaching reading may be exactly the opposite of what the other first grade teacher in the same school wishes to utilize. The credibility of the mentor teacher effectively influences the mentor/mentee relationship, just as “the source of a message is a dominant factor in that message’s persuasiveness” (McCroskey et al., 2014). When information is received by someone, it is examined and either accepted or not based on the feelings of the recipient towards the messenger.

In addition to the mentor influence, there also needs to be a focus on actual practical hands-on experiences between the mentor/mentee relationships (O’Connor et al., 2011). New teachers often require actual practice with concepts, just as learners of all ages do. Alternatively certified teachers crave this as well, requiring a mixture of actual content knowledge and application throughout their service training (Parker et al., 2008). Offering this type of hands-on support from mentors allows mentees to feel as though they can take away more concrete evidence of their success in the classroom (O’Connor et al., 2011).

One other predictor of successful relationships between mentors and mentees involves the amount of emotional support involved (Ricci & Zetlin, 2013). New teachers enter the classroom with a vast array of confidence levels, ranging from the secure and confident new teacher, to the exact opposite one who experiences feelings of inadequacy (Abell et al., 2014).

Particularly those on the lower end of the confidence spectrum must receive additional emotional support to help build up their ability to feel as though they are doing a good job, and are contributing to the overall field of education, but most importantly, contributing to the success of their students. A good administrator will recognize that an alternatively certified teacher often needs this additional support and will place them with mentors who have more experience and who are more patient and calming (Brenner et al., 2015). Even the busiest of mentor teachers knows the value of time and patience when dealing with new hires who experience low self-esteem or who lack the necessary confidence to try new things and forge ahead with running their classroom (Goering, 2013). Emotional bonding, such as what happens when confidence building occurs between a pair of teachers, can develop a relationship that is lasting and that can be nurtured over time, not just during the initial new hire year of the mentee. Not only does the new teacher benefit from such a relationship, but the mentor does as well (Kissau & King, 2015). Both parties learn and grow because of each other by the simple exchange of ideas, and by the sharing of frustrations, from which grows answers and improvements.

### **Mentorship Program Outcomes**

There are many outcomes available after participation in a well-designed mentorship program for a new teacher. Some of these outcomes will be viewed as positive, while some will be viewed as negative. Either way, Kissau and King's (2015) research insists there are changes in teacher beliefs and assumptions before and after participation in mentorship programs. Regardless of a positive or negative outcome, a teacher will experience various levels of self-efficacy depending on both the influence of their mentorship program and their own personal beliefs and reactions (Gur, Cakiroglu, & Capa-Aydin, 2012; Kivilcim, Toros, Miman, & Soyer, 2013; Tan, 2012). On the positive side, both traditionally and alternatively certified teachers

experience the vast resources at their fingertips, including simple mentor/mentee conversations. A new teacher with no college or university preparation for the teaching profession often has no idea about curriculum planning, pacing guides, and other valuable items that are beneficial resources (Kissau & King, 2015). A good mentor can be certain the new teacher has whatever resource is necessary to succeed. Even if the mentor does not actually have the materials needed to give the new hire, there is usually a knowledge of who to go to and what request procedure needs to take place for obtaining these items. Some districts utilize mentors at the central administration office level, in conjunction with the in-house mentors, just as Timberlake Public Schools does (TCPS, 2018d). These mentors are typically supervisors who oversee content areas, such as English, math, science, social studies, and foreign language/English as a second language, music /performing arts, and others. Because they have direct access to the ordering of their specific content materials, they are excellent resources for the new teacher who needs materials and can also become a peer coach who can assist practicing educators in taking on new identities as they progress through their teacher phases (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012).

Other beliefs and assumptions of new hire teachers often change over time, particularly during the first year of employment, sometimes in a negative manner. Teachers tend to enter the classroom for the first time in charge of groups of children who are eager to learn and have smiling faces on the first day. The teacher believes each child will sit in the seat, listen intently, all while behaving well, and then produce work due to the knowledge taken in from oneself. Then reality sets in, and the teacher sees that every day will not be like the first. Children begin to feel more at ease, and comfortable with pushing their boundaries to test their teachers. It is often at that moment the new teacher realizes teaching is not an easy job. Children's behavior, for example, can cause a teacher to feel the pressures of the profession. Learning how to manage

classroom behavior is one of the most valuable courses a traditionally certified teacher takes during the college or university preparation program stage. An alternatively certified teacher has missed out on this course and therefore, is left to figure things out on one's own (Certification Map, 2016). Traditional mentorship programs often spend little time on this topic, as most teachers have taken the appropriate coursework to cover the information needed. This leaves a gap for the alternative teacher to fill in some way to improve their overall teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Pretorius, 2012). Of course, a good mentor will see what is happening if the lines of communication are always open and will be able to step in and assist the new teacher with this topic. Some mentor teachers however have so much going on, they feel overwhelmed having to do additional things to assist these alternatively certified new hires, thus leading to problems within the relationship (Goering, 2013).

Another possible positive outcome of mentorship programs can be the ability to increase retention rates of teachers. However, currently, retention rates of new teachers continue to decrease over time all around the world, placing more emphasis on up front support of new teachers (Kidd et al., 2015). If new teachers are given the opportunity to experience a well-designed induction mentorship program with their school system, they are more likely to want to remain in the profession, adding to the retention rates throughout their state (USDOE, 2018). When a teacher enters the profession through an alternative route, along with being a new teacher in general, there must be open lines of communication, which will lead to this feeling of support that will empower them to do great things despite their lack of initial training (Kidd et al., 2015). Making the new teacher feel as though there is plenty of support through the mentorship program is imperative and will allow that person to assimilate into a profession that is welcoming and encourages one to want to remain in place for a long period of time.

Negatively speaking, teachers are often lured away from the profession by the idea of making more money with their degree than they are currently making by teaching, particularly if one is not satisfied with the current employment (Kutsyruba et al., 2014). Common sense dictates that when a person feels satisfied with their current job, less feelings of wanting to leave come to the surface. When someone is constantly struggling to stay caught up with workloads, never seems to have control of the classroom, is not accomplishing pre-set administrative goals, or is not communicating well with students, that person is bound to feel as though a change might be the fix to the problem. Although sometimes a change is what is needed, a well-structured mentorship program can manage to curb this idea of leaving by making the teacher feel more grounded in the job itself, and in turn, happier overall with job satisfaction (Malanson et al., 2014). Often teachers are also struggling with the frequent changes and requirements set forth by various government agencies and their own in-house administrations, such as dealing with new evaluation styles, changes to curriculum, and many others (Stecher, Garet, Holtzman, & Hamilton, 2012). The use of reflection by the new teacher can also be helpful in this type of situation (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010). When things are going badly, it is easy to want to quit and move on to something else. This is when a mentor can be well-utilized by suggesting the new hire sit down and make a list of what is going right and what is going wrong. Often it becomes clear on paper that it just appears to be the negative winning out, but there are plenty of good things happening. Such as teachers learning new things from each other, which they in turn share with their students to enhance their classroom experiences. The challenge is then to inquire about what can be done to move more of the negative column over to the positive column (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010). This procedure will assist the new teachers in realizing that remaining in the



profession and working hard to make the necessary changes will get them where they need to be both mentally and physically, therefore, increasing retention rates overall.

The power to improve overall teacher and teaching quality is also possible with an emphasis on the induction and mentorship period of a new hire, which highlights more positivity for mentorship programs (Conway, 2015). No state is alone in their efforts to improve their support for new teachers. Each of them wants to meet the challenge of holding all stakeholders accountable for the increased success of their students, while struggling to find the resources to make it happen (Sun, 2012). There are multiple opportunities during this time for teachers to learn vast amounts of helpful information that was not possible to be ascertained without the benefit of a traditional college or university teacher preparation program (Conway, 2015).

Teachers blossom from novice new hires to seasoned veterans over a long period. However, the sheer amount of professional development required during this mentorship period can serve as the bridge to the early stages of this seasoned veteran goal (Kidd et al., 2015). Professional development activities can include a vast array of training that can be utilized to address both deficiencies that need attention as well as to share information that is already working in other classrooms with teachers who are struggling in areas. Collaborative professional development appears to yield the best results (Liu, Tsai, & Huang, 2015). This type of in-service allows teachers to get involved with the actual training itself, instead of just sitting and listening. Hands-on demonstrations of ideas and theories allow the teachers to try out and model what will happen in the classroom with the students involved (Liu et al., 2015).

There can be negative side-effects of new teacher professional development however. One chief complaint of many teachers is the idea of sitting through countless professional development sessions but leaving with no valuable take-away at all (Bell-Robertson, 2015).

Sometimes professional development is assigned to teachers simply due to district or state requirements. Teachers often see this as a waste of time, when all the while they could be getting valuable work done instead. Professional development must be tailored to meet the immediate needs of teachers, particularly when it revolves solely around new teachers. This is especially important when dealing with alternatively certified teachers. They need additional and alternative forms of support that will address the specific questions they have, while offering suggestions and resources that can alleviate any current issues they may be experiencing (Bell-Robertson, 2015).

Overall, mentorship program outcomes can certainly vary across the board as far as any teacher is concerned, whether it is a traditionally certified or alternatively certified one, since mentoring of any kind is a key strategy during teacher induction in determining many factors such as effectiveness and retention (Zembytska, 2016). The opportunity for both positive and negative outcomes is always something to be prepared for, and to amend if necessary.

Administrators can make a big difference in this case because they have the authority to make changes or adapt situations as they see fit (Brenner et al., 2015). When a new hire enters their building, it is imperative that the administrators know and understand the special needs that come with alternatively certified new hires. Just like with the mentors that are assigned to these new hires, the administrators need to be trained on the differences in what knowledge they arrive with, versus what knowledge a traditionally certified teacher arrives with, so they can adjust as needed (Brenner et al., 2015). They need to consider how factors such as class size, professional development, and general induction processes during mentorship can have an impact on a new teacher who needs guidance and monitoring at a higher rate than other more experienced teachers (Krasnoff, 2014).

### **Filling the Gap with Alternative Mentorship Programs**

While there is quite a bit of information available through research regarding mentorship programs, as noted above, there are still many topics either not yet examined or that are developing. One such topic is how these programs deliver professional development to their new teachers (Kidd et al., 2015). Often, induction mentorship programs are focused on providing the new teacher with a mentor. While this is a good idea, there must be more included to make a successful mentorship program work (TCPS, 2018d). There must be professional development offered, that can not only assist the classically trained teacher who has graduated from a college or university teacher preparation program, but also the one that has entered the profession through an alternate route to certification (Kidd et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, alternatively certified teachers typically miss out on learning important skills such as classroom management, instructional planning methods, and others, which makes the assimilation into the teaching profession a less smooth transition than it currently does for many of them. Creating specific professional development can certainly assist with this goal, while teaching specific strategies that will be used in the classroom and not simply in theory is useful as well.

The supplementation of mentor training was also an important goal of this study. Mentors across the country understand how to deal with new teachers who have entered the profession through traditional routes to licensure, thereby having taken courses to specifically prepare them for what lies ahead. What many of them do not understand is how to deal with those who enter through alternative methods, who have missed out on specific training courses that teach them how to teach. A goal of this study was to start a conversation regarding the training potential mentors need to first, understand the background of an alternatively certified teacher, and secondly, how to assist that teacher to overcome any deficiency that exists. Simple

verbal conversation tools between mentor and mentee can aid in this goal (Hellsten et al., 2009). Many times, a teacher tends to want to forget about a problem that is happening, instead of addressing the issue up front and trying to reach a way to improve the situation. Collaboration between stakeholders can prove useful here because it is always better to have more than one mind at work when there is a problem to solve (Liu et al., 2015). The adage of “it takes a village to raise a child” certainly applies in this instance. No one person can handle everything that comes along the path of teaching students, however, a team can do so. Huling, Resta, and Yeargain (2012) point out that cohort groups of new teachers who link together over the first five years in a school system can lead to benefits for the school district, the teachers, and the students over time. This allows the teachers to meet over time and discuss situations, obstacles, and pedagogy, where they have time to reflect on their experiences.

Mentors can also benefit from a properly designed and regulated mentorship program. Kissau and King (2015) point out that peer mentoring can be a mutually beneficial experience, if the correct circumstances happen. Both parties must be willing participants of course, and both need to collaboratively work together. If this happens, there will be opportunities for both the mentor and the mentee to learn from each other and from the situations that occur. The mentee learns obvious things, such as how to facilitate day-to-day teaching. However, the mentor can learn just as much, if not more, than the mentee, because there are always chances to learn new ways of doing things. Many experienced teachers have taught for so many years that they may or may not be up on the latest technology, or the latest research that demonstrates new ideas that will spark creativity in students (Lebak & Tinsley, 2010). A new teacher can share many of these ideas along the way and inspire a mentor teacher to want to try new things and make changes in their own classroom.

Another key component to a successful mentorship program is communication. There must be constant communication with new hires when they begin teaching. These employees need to feel they are not being left to fend for themselves, but rather that they are part of a team which will support them. The entire teaching and administrative staff can assist with this venture. Just because someone is not the specific assigned mentor to a new teacher does not preclude any employee from reaching out and offering support. As part of the entire school staff team, it is up to everyone to do their part in assisting the new hire in becoming a team player. The impact felt by a new teacher either in a positive or a negative way can have lasting results, which will determine the fate of that person, which in turn determines the fate of the atmosphere of the entire school. The more professional and purposeful communication between staff, the more likely the impact will be positive.

While utilizing well-planned professional development, training mentor teachers well, and thoroughly communicating among all parties involved with a new hire teacher, there is a good chance there will be a successful outcome. However, this should not be left simply to chance. There is also a need for follow-up checks and balances. Often teachers are placed in positions and it is assumed that the current mentorship program in place will do what it is supposed to do. There may be no one checking on the teacher to see if all is working as it should. Administrators need to take a solid role in following up, not only with the use of standard evaluations, but also by periodic conversations with both the mentors and the mentees, and anyone else involved in the induction period of the new hires. This will ensure all necessary components are acting as they should and producing the desired outcomes. After all, just because a mentorship program is in place, does not mean it is the right one, with all the proper

strengths and supports. It must be examined for both the nature and the purpose that will lead to successful outcomes (Kearney, 2016).

Filling this gap in the literature will, in turn, further topic understanding of becoming teachers of inquiry by first being inquirers of teaching and learning during these mentorship programs (Klein et al., 2015). Each new hire deserves a chance to be the best that is possible, equaling the playing field of both traditional and alternative entry teachers. Ultimately, mentoring offers the opportunity to mediate professional learning, therefore, much thought must go into ensuring the creation of a program that will benefit everyone (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, & Aspfors, 2014). Having conversations through participant interviews with alternatively certified teachers, while discussing their experiences of participating in traditional teacher mentorship programs, shed light on this gap. Giving teachers a voice in possible change that will benefit all those to come empowers them, therefore, adding a sense of openness and honesty to the conversations. While there are no guarantees, this study will spur on whatever changes are necessary to ensure success possibilities for all teachers, regardless of their entry methods.

The use of the pilot study was helpful, as were the alternative teacher participant interviews. The pilot study allowed the interviews to be more focused and insightful because the responses from this group helped guide the teacher questions asked. Discussing the pros and cons of the alternative teachers opened a line of discussion that will also be helpful to the administrators (Brenner et al., 2015). Many times, the district Human Resources officials are the ones placing these teachers where they see fit, therefore, school level administrators do not always have the final say in who gets hired and who does not in their building. They often have input, but sometimes it is not as simple as who they want, but rather who must be placed and

where it must be done. When an alternatively certified teacher is placed in a principal's school, it is hit or miss as to whether that particular administrator has prior knowledge of how this type of licensure works. Therefore, hearing some thoughts of an administrator during the pilot study, the research was able to include all angles, not just those of the alternatively certified teachers.

O'Connor et al. (2011) outline a program in New York called the Teaching Fellows Program. This allows teachers to obtain a two-year training prior to obtaining their certification as an alternative teacher. Other than the obvious drawback of perspective teachers not being able to start right away, but rather having to wait at least two years for minimal training, this program is a possible way to combat what appears to be another negative to alternatively certified teachers participating in traditional mentorship programs. A variation on this idea can be developed and implemented which will have a smaller induction period and be collectively added into the teacher's schedule. There might be an opportunity for the new teacher to have a reduced teaching schedule, while being allowed to attend training during other hours of the school day that will supplement the alternatively certified teachers to get them what they need.

Regardless of what has come from this research, any additional look at the state of current traditional mentorship programs can only serve to benefit those involved. When something is examined closely by talking to the actual people that are involved in a program, true information is gleaned, providing the necessary tools to move forward with collaboration to make things better. The involvement of all stakeholders, from central office administrators to new hire teachers themselves, is necessary to build an alternative mentorship program that will both supplement and support those who enter the profession with limited background teaching knowledge. This will then lead to higher retention rates for school districts and states in general, therefore, helping the people that education is most vital to, the students. Ensuring that

organizational and administrative issues are ironed out in mentorship programs can facilitate better and more frequent communication and openness that can, in turn, provide a path to success for both teachers and students (Menon, 2012).

### **Summary**

As shown in the proceeding chapter, the current bodies of literature, as well as the historical literature involving theoretical frameworks, both provide information regarding alternatively certified teachers from all types of disciplines. The problem is that no qualitative studies were located that provide detailed impact data regarding participation in traditional mentorship programs that are completed by alternatively certified teachers. This multiple case study specifically addressed gaps in the existing literature regarding this issue by allowing for an understanding of the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers. There were varying results, as predicted by Schultz and Ravitch (2013), as they discussed the fact that prior experiences of alternatively certified teachers can impact their experiences during the first-year induction period.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

Yin (2014) surmises that a multiple case study is only one means of delving into knowledge which can be gained regarding a human experience. However, it does offer a vehicle in which to do so that allows the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the individual cases (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. This chapter outlines the important facets to this process including design, research questions, procedures, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis. Credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and the ethical considerations are also discussed.

### **Design**

The research study was a qualitative multiple case study design. This research design is defined as one that involves the study of multiple cases within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). The use of a multiple case study allowed the researcher to utilize bounded cases to gather multiple data collection methods involving multiple sources of information (Yin, 2009). The multiple case method was chosen over the single case method since the first illuminated the issue with a wider lens and more details were gleaned from multiple participants (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Because the purpose of this study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers, utilizing a multiple case study allowed for the participants to explain the steps taken throughout the program, told in a chronologically organized and detailed manner (Yin, 2009). Deep and rich information was gleaned from this

type of qualitative research design; therefore, it allowed the researcher to garner an in-depth description and understanding of a traditional mentorship program (Yin, 2009). The use of direct interpretation, establishing patterns, and developing naturalistic generalizations allowed the researcher to focus specifically on the cases themselves, while merging them together systematically at the end (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study and served to re-focus the researcher as needed throughout the entire process. These questions helped narrow the focus of the proposed study, while they acted as a springboard for the specific interview questions for participants.

#### **Central Question**

How did participation in a traditional teacher mentorship program in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia impact alternatively certified teachers' success?

#### **Sub-Questions**

1. How did the participants describe the benefits of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?
2. How did the participants describe the challenges of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?
3. How did participation in a traditional mentorship program impact the participants' beliefs and assumptions of their classroom experiences?

## **Setting**

The setting for this multiple case study was a suburban school district located in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia, given the pseudonym of Timberlake County Public Schools (TCPS), for identity protection. This purposefully chosen setting was used due to the large amount of alternatively certified teachers, approximately 10-15 per school year, who entered the profession with this school district (Certification Map, 2016). Various building levels were utilized in choosing participants to include elementary, middle, and high school. The school district enrolls approximately 14,000 students throughout the county in 28 school buildings (17 elementary schools, five middle schools, five high schools, and one technical high school) (TCPS, 2018c). Full-time staff members totaling over 2,200 serve daily to educate students of varying ethnicities to include African American at 7%, Asian at 4%, Hispanic at 5%, and other minorities at 6% (TCPS, 2018c). The special education student population is 15% of the overall combined regular and special education population (TCPS, 2018c). A school board and a superintendent, followed by numerous central office administrators, filtering down to building level principals and assistant principals, govern the school system (TCPS, 2018c). Interviews with alternatively certified teacher participants were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location of their choosing, taking their privacy into account. Observations took place within the classroom of each teacher participant.

## **Participants**

Participants for this multiple case study were chosen through purposeful criterion sampling procedures (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). This type of sampling allowed the researcher to choose the specific teacher participants who had experienced the program of interest, therefore facilitating the understanding of events by the researcher, to form a working understanding of

how the traditional mentorship program worked and impacted their success (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). Maximum variation was achieved by the participation of four Caucasian males, and nine females, eight Caucasian and one African American. Four of these participants taught at the elementary building level, four at the middle level, three at the high level, one at the technical high level, and one who traveled to multiple building levels based upon need (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). The sample size included 13 teacher participants, typical to multiple case studies (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of all schools and participants. The choice of alternatively certified teacher participants was bounded by those who had worked less than three years in this school system, those who were new to the profession when they were hired in this school system, those who participated in the same traditional teacher mentorship program, and those who entered the profession through alternative routes to certification.

### **Procedures**

It is understood through Liberty University policy (Liberty University School of Education, 2018) that for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to grant approval, one must first seek school district pre-approval. This step was completed through the Timberlake County Public School system. I utilized a panel of experts to conduct a pilot study, including two alternatively certified teachers who had been in the field for several years, and a principal who supervised alternatively certified teachers to ensure the interview questions for the teachers were appropriate, timely, unbiased, and relevant.

Once Liberty University IRB approval was received, I began working with the human resources director and the licensure manager to ascertain a list of possible candidates who met the abovementioned criteria. The human resources director sent an email to 36 alternatively

certified teachers, inviting them to participate in the study, along with the proper consent form. After two weeks, I had only received six responses from those agreeing to participate in the research. At that time, the human resources director sent a follow-up email to those who had not yet responded. Within two more weeks, I received an additional seven responses from those agreeing to participate in my research study, for a total of 13. Once the list of participants was created, I began to contact each one to collect the consent forms and schedule the interviews.

Once participants were secured, data collection began with document analysis/archival records, field notes/observations, and teacher interviews. Document analysis/archival records allowed me to gather literature regarding the school systems' mentorship program, along with various documents from the teachers. Field notes/observations included what I learned by reading the information regarding the structure of the traditional mentorship program for this school district. All one-on-one teacher interviews were recorded utilizing two devices and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Next, I included what I saw during the one-hour observations of the teacher participants in their classroom settings and documented my findings in the field notes. I observed things such as room organization and decor, classroom management, teaching methods, and interactions with students. I also included any thoughts or questions that came to mind throughout the entire research process. The data was then systematically organized and stored. Member checks and peer reviews were performed, and safety procedures such as password protected storage were, and continue to be, utilized.

Preliminary analysis, coding, cross-case synthesis, and naturalistic generalizations were undertaken (Creswell, 2013). Once data analysis was complete, chapters four and five of the dissertation were completed. The manuscript was then submitted for review and edits were made based on the chair, and then on committee, feedback. At the time that all requested edits

were made, the committee chair submitted the manuscript to the research consultant for further editing, and eventually approval. Upon the research consultant's approval, the manuscript was sent to a professional editor. The dissertation defense was then scheduled as the final step. Paper data collected throughout the process has been and will continue to be stored in locked areas, as well as electronic data in a password protected environment. This data was only stored until the final dissertation document was published, then destroyed by the shredding of paper documents and the deletion of electronic files.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As a former licensure specialist for a public-school district, I saw many new teachers come and go. Often the ones that struggled the most were the alternatively certified teachers. They typically lacked student teaching, along with professional studies courses that “teach them how to teach.” Traditional mentorship programs in the school district were geared for the majority, which were those who had graduated from traditional teacher preparation programs, therefore, needing less guidance than alternatively certified new hires. Many of these alternatively certified teachers felt lost in the process, resigning well before their traditionally licensed counterparts (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). Mentorship programs can be tweaked for those entering through the alternative routes, therefore, offering more support and varied experiences to supplement what skills they lack at the start. This could initiate a retention and tenure increase for that group. I still had access to this same school district, even though I no longer worked there, as I maintained a good relationship with both the administration and the teachers. My new job was closely tied to the school system because we are involved in the same insurance consortium. Because of this, I spoke with the human resources director often at meetings, who was the person who assisted in providing names of possible participants who met the study's

requirements. Because I left the school licensure position in November of 2014, there was no possibility that I had worked directly with any of the participants regarding their licensure situation.

This study was based upon the need for improvement and enhancement of mentorship programs for alternatively certified teachers (Creswell, 2013). As the human instrument for this study, my essential role was to conduct research in an ethical and thorough manner to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). To accomplish this goal, I worked from an epistemological philosophical assumption of knowing, based on a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm to guide the study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). Utilizing a multiple case study, I was able to minimize my biases by engaging in strict data protocols such as member checks, peer reviews, and verbatim interview transcripts (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

Critical to qualitative inquiry, rigorous and multiple data collection techniques were paramount to a successful and acceptable research study (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). It was of the utmost importance to utilize triangulation in data collection to ensure the study was valid and trustworthy (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). For this proposed study, data collection included the use of document analysis/archival records, teacher interviews, and field notes/observations (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

### **Document Analysis/Archival Records**

Document analysis allowed the researcher to utilize triangulation of data collection methods to enhance trustworthiness, as well as to increase understanding of the impact on the participants and is a typical case study tool in the data collection process (Creswell, 2013; Stake,

1995; Yin, 2009). Document analysis of items, such as the district's mentor program protocol/policy document, were completed. This document is available for public viewing on the school district's website. This allowed for a complete understanding of how the traditional mentorship program was supposed to function. This was an important step in the data collection process, as the researcher needed to be fully aware of the ins and outs of the program involved. Without a formal understanding of the program, there would have been no way to take in the descriptions given by the teachers in the upcoming interviews and formalize them into data that could be studied and reviewed.

Further document analysis of archival records occurred later, with the use of teacher evaluations, given voluntarily to the researcher from the participants, which allowed the researcher to see any noted improvements or deficits. Those types of records were also viewable by the teachers, who could access them through the school system's Talent Ed program. The teacher evaluations were also used to verify the retention time of the teachers. Retention rates are often severely affected by the new hire experiences of alternatively certified teachers (Kidd et al., 2015). Very limited student improvement data was secured from the school system's testing coordinator since most of the participants were either first year teachers with no comparable data available, or that many of them taught subjects for which testing data is not tracked by those particular teachers (i.e. special education).

### **Teacher Interviews**

Once the overall concept of the new hire mentorship program was explored and understood, interviews of the teacher participants began. Rowley (2012) suggested conducting interviews to search for facts and insights from participants. The process consisted of designing and planning, conducting the interviews, and making sense of the data after they were all



completed (Rowley, 2012). Preceding data collection allowed specific focus to be placed on the proposed interview questions, to ensure they were appropriate for the specific school district. Additional focusing of the proposed interview questions occurred using a small pilot study regarding which interview questions to utilize. The pilot study was conducted using a principal and two alternatively certified teachers, where they provided feedback regarding the clarity of the proposed questions. This allowed the interview questions to be re-configured, as necessary, based on the feedback of the pilot study participants, making them more relevant and succinct in nature (Yin, 2009). Once the pilot study was complete, the open-ended interviews with the alternatively certified teacher participants were conducted, during the summer months when school was not in session. Utilizing open-ended questions allowed the conversation to flow more naturally than using yes or no questions (Creswell, 2013). The data was richer and more descriptive as well (Creswell, 2013). Every effort was made to protect the integrity of the interviews with the following: allowing wait time after asking questions, not interrupting the speaker, not leading the speaker, and not interjecting personal opinions. Specifically, these interviews included alternatively certified teachers from various building levels of elementary, middle, and high schools, varied in number, and were recorded with two devices and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist (Creswell, 2013).

Teachers often enter the classroom on their first day of employment with varying sets of anxieties and insecurities, but none so on the forefront of their mind as those who have entered the profession through an alternative certification method. These teachers often had little to no formal teacher training. They had simply graduated from college with a four-year degree in a subject area, with no teaching methods courses and no student teaching experiences (USDOE, 2018). For the interviews, questions were presented allowing them to describe their participation

in a traditional mentorship program, being careful to have chosen only open-ended questions to stay on track which lead back to the purpose of the study itself (Creswell, 2013). Questions regarding what they perceived as the benefits and challenges of participating in a traditional mentorship program were included as well. After the interviews, the researcher was able to fully understand and explain the traditional mentorship program in a holistic and ethical manner, while describing the issues in a detailed format. These individual open-ended interviews with the teacher participants are a typical data collection method for the qualitative inquiry of multiple case studies (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

There were 13 initial open-ended interviews, one per teacher, lasting approximately one to one and a half hours. No additional follow-up interviews were conducted, as they were not necessary. The interviews were held at convenient locations for the teachers, based on their summer schedules. Most were held in cafes such as Starbucks, where the participants were comfortable and at ease while the interviews took place. The participants were all alternatively certified teachers. Each interview was recorded on two devices (a cellular telephone application called Voice Recorder and an Olympus digital voice recorder). Files from the Voice Recorder application were then sent to a professional transcriptionist through a company called Rev.

### **Standardized open-ended teacher interview questions.**

#### ***Pre-participation in a traditional mentorship program.***

1. Please tell me about yourself (i.e. things you like to do, your family, where and what you teach, etc.).
2. Tell me why you decided to become a (*insert content area of interviewee*) teacher through an alternative route and how you decided on the subject you teach?
3. Please tell me about the process of how you became an alternatively certified teacher

(i.e. the type of alternative route to licensure you took, etc.).

4. Please describe your first day in the classroom with students.
5. How confident did you feel in your abilities to be a successful teacher on that first day?

***During participation in a traditional mentorship program.***

6. Please tell me about your mentor/mentee relationship during your new hire mentorship induction program at both the district level and the school level.
7. Please tell me about the specific components of your mentorship program that you experienced that first year (i.e. new hire meetings in and out of the school building, the availability and quality of advice and direction given, etc.).
8. What specific supports were available to you in the traditional mentorship program?
9. What specific supports were missing in the traditional mentorship program?

***Post-participation in a traditional mentorship program.***

10. Based on how the mentorship program fostered your knowledge of teaching, please describe what you perceive as your strengths after completion of the traditional mentorship program.
11. Please also describe what you perceive as your challenges or areas of continued growth that were or are still needed after completion of the traditional mentorship program.
12. In an effort to provide the school district with useful and practical feedback, what do you believe needs to be enhanced or added to the traditional mentorship program for alternatively certified teachers like yourself?
13. How confident do you feel in your abilities to be a successful teacher now that you

have completed the mentorship program?

The purpose of the specific pre-participation interview questions was to get an idea of how the alternatively certified teachers came to be where they are now, as well as to get a sense of how they felt in the beginning of their career as a teacher. Questions one through three simply broke the ice, while giving the researcher insight into the participants and their backgrounds, which allowed for interviewer/interviewee rapport to be established (Creswell, 2013). Questions four and five lead to the first experiences of the teachers prior to them entering the true mentorship program. Background experiences can severely enhance or inhibit the success of a mentorship program (Simoes & Alarcao, 2014).

The purpose of the during-participation interview questions was to navigate the experiences of the teachers as they progressed through the traditional mentorship program. Question six attended to the relationship formed between mentor and mentee. This often remains overlooked as an important factor during this process, but this oversight can have a terrible consequence. Sometimes mentors have their own agendas when agreeing to be paired with a mentee. This can seriously inhibit the success of the program, as they are not focused on the mentee, but rather on accomplishing their own personal goals, such as earning points towards teacher certification renewal (Smith & Engemann, 2015). Question seven built a framework of the traditional mentorship program in place (TCPS, 2018d). Questions eight and nine began to specifically look at what supports were present or missing, that did or could have, benefited the alternatively certified teacher during the process (Bell-Robertson, 2015).

The purpose of the post-participation interview questions was to find out what types of strengths and challenges the teachers possess and face now that they have completed a traditional mentorship program. Questions 10 and 11 allowed the participants to explore their own

strengths and weaknesses as they perceived them after their mentorship program participation. Question 12 specifically allowed the participant to specify things that are lacking in the traditional mentorship program that could have been helpful to them as an alternatively certified teacher (Conway, 2015). Question 13 simply allowed the participant to share their innermost feelings regarding their own personal confidence after participation in a traditional mentorship program. Each of these questions allowed the participants to share their thoughts which translated into a full, rich, detailed experience pertaining to the structure of the traditional mentorship program.

### **Field Notes/Observations**

Throughout the document analysis/archival records and data collection of teacher interviews process, field notes/observations were a helpful method for capturing thoughts, questions, and visual cues that might otherwise be later forgotten (Schwandt, 2015). Actual classroom overt observations of each teacher participant for approximately one hour allowed me to:

- observe the teachers' interactions with students
- observe their overall styles of teaching
- observe the general flow of the classes
- observe the physicality of their classroom arrangements

Overt observations were chosen over covert ones. This was because teachers felt more inclined to act naturally, as opposed to being worried about why I was there or what I was looking for if the observations had been covert. Field notes were taken both on site and later as I reflected on the observations. Because there was always the possibility that a teacher simply had a bad day, a follow-up phone call or email between myself and each teacher was offered. Although each

observation went well, and none of them needed to reach out to me to explain any issues, this option allowed the teachers to be at ease with their students, knowing they could explain any irregularities. Several of the teachers did either email me for my opinion of how the class went or talked to me for a few minutes before or after their classes offering additional details. All my notes regarding these observations were part of the basis of evidence I have used to support my understanding of the impact of a traditional mentorship program on alternatively certified teachers (Schwandt, 2015). All field notes are accurate, organized, and descriptive, while focusing on the research problem as I recorded overall observations, thoughts, and questions (University of Southern California Research Libraries, 2016). Field notes were also made as I read the documents and records collected, engaged in the teacher interviews, and any time I reflected on the research process.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data collection had taken place, the analysis stage commenced. For this multiple case study, the Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) texts were utilized as the primary sources of information. Supplemental secondary texts such as Creswell (2013) were also referred to as needed. Data analysis included the use of preliminary analysis, coding, cross-case synthesis, and the development of naturalistic generalizations.

### **Preliminary Analysis**

The use of a professional transcriptionist for the teacher interviews was first in the data analysis process, to get the data into a written format (Yin, 2014). These transcriptions and any other data were organized in a pre-determined manner so that all data was stored systematically. Information was stored in one place, while repetitive words and phrases were noted, for coding and development of themes (Creswell, 2013). This allowed the data to be organized and ready

for reading and re-reading multiple times. Yin (2009) suggested that in order to live in the data, one must be immersed in it. Reading through the data continuously allowed the researcher to become immersed in the information, therefore, making it relevant to the experiences of the interviewees (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Memoing the data allowed for thoughts to be recorded that helped lead to the codes and themes that emerged (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). This memoing allowed thoughts that appeared random at the time to tie things together as the data was continuously read (Yin, 2009).

### **Coding**

All data collected was examined closely to determine commonalities that allowed them to be classified as similar information. Since there was a multitude of data to examine, one had to contrive a method of grouping similar information together, therefore beginning the process of narrowing down to be able to classify items (Yin, 2009). Classifying required the researcher to decide what pieces of data fit together in a cohesive manner and were of a similar topic (Creswell, 2013). The classification then led to interpretation of the meaning of the data by the researcher in order to assign specific codes. Interpreting the meaning of the data broke down the items into specific codes that began to guide the thought processes of the researcher as the information continued to narrow down common themes surrounding the participants' descriptions of the traditional mentorship program (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). Originally this led to over 100 codes, which then needed to be reduced to 25-30 codes, making the data more manageable. It was not possible to contend with 100 codes due to the sheer overwhelming amount of information. A smaller number of 25-30 codes allowed for a full description to unfold from the data collected during the teacher interviews (Creswell, 2013).

From these codes, five to six themes were identified to help the organization of the data to solidify into tighter and more precise sections (Creswell, 2013). These themes became the anchors of the participants' descriptions, therefore outlining the researcher's findings in the final dissertation. There is a detailed description of each case and the themes within the cases (within-case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis), as well as assertions or interpretations of the meaning of each case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). The themes allowed the data to be broken down into meaningful commonalities and pieces of information, which were then interpreted to understand the participants' descriptions (Creswell, 2013). The overall concept was to take a multitude of data and continuously group common pieces of information together to break it down from the overall information gathered from the participants. This allowed for detailed analysis of the cases, which in turn lead to the development of the issues at hand (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). It was also helpful to represent and visualize the data into charts and figures to make the data more meaningful and appealing to the intended audience (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing visuals such as bar graphs, pie charts, or other similar options allows the reader to see the written information in a concise and appealing optical format.

### **Cross-Case Synthesis**

Specific to case study research, direct interpretation allowed the researcher to look at single instances as a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together again, but in more meaningful ways. This in turn led to the establishment of patterns across categories (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). Each of the individual cases were analyzed to examine the similarities and differences between them (Yin, 2009). Because utilizing multiple cases strengthened the overall research and provided a more comprehensive explanation of the



traditional mentorship program opportunity, this cross-case synthesis was of the utmost importance. This data analysis technique, as it allowed the researcher to see both similarities and differences, translated into commonalities, which in turn evolved into themes that were explored throughout the research phase (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

### **Naturalistic Generalizations**

Finally, the naturalistic generalizations that were formed by the researcher will allow readers of the research to learn from the cases or possibly from themselves, while being able to see plausible connections (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). These emerged when the researcher was able to feel as though they had experienced the traditional mentorship program, due to the clear and detailed descriptions offered by each individual case (Stake, 1995). These generalizations also lent themselves to potential implications of the study at hand for future research possibilities, as they connected various contexts and settings (Yin, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is possibly one of the most important outcomes of research. Trustworthiness revolves around the qualities of the study that ensure reliability for the reader (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Without it, the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability will come into question, and those who the intended audience are will not be interested, therefore, rendering the extreme efforts involved in this type of research a colossal waste of time. The researcher must maintain a trusting relationship with the reader, therefore, solidifying the importance of the study.

### **Credibility**

Having credibility means accurately describing reality. The richness of the information gathered during data collection and the analytic integrity of that data are what produce credibility

(Creswell, 2013). For this study, utilizing triangulation of three data collection methods began to achieve this requirement. Peer review to ensure accuracy and non-bias was included to ensure credibility (Creswell, 2013). This allowed an outside person to take an unbiased look at the research and clear up any confusion, highlight any possible needs, and make any suggestions. The use of personal reflexivity on the part of the researcher also illuminated any possible biases that influenced the research. This was accomplished by using field notes to capture personal thoughts, reasons for adaptations to the research, or any other biases that could have influenced the overall venture (Creswell, 2013).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is also important, as it relates similarly to reliability in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2013). Consistency was addressed here through rich details of the participants' descriptions told to the intended audience (Creswell, 2013). Having the participants read over the data as it was presented to ensure it was interpreted correctly served as member checks (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability stems from the research being grounded in the literature. Since all components of the research were grounded in this way, they were the foundation to a successful research plan and dissertation. Utilizing citations and proper references ensured confirmability as to the literature that backed the research and framed the purpose, research questions, and ultimately, the entire plan (Creswell, 2013).

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possibility that what was found will be applicable to another study (Creswell, 2013). Data saturation ensured transferability was met through fully exploring each angle so that further research will continue to yield the same or similar results (Creswell,

2013). This also told the researcher when the number of interviews and questions yielded enough data to move on to the data analysis stage (Creswell, 2013). Using rich, thick description throughout the research dissertation pages offers a route to easily facilitate replication of the research by any future researchers (Stake, 1995). Being specific, using direct quotes from the participants, and laying out the details of the traditional mentorship program served as catalysts for this technique (Yin, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

There were many ethical considerations when conducting this type of research. Seeking IRB approval was the first step in this journey. This process ensured that all procedures met with ethical guidelines when followed implicitly throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013). Obtaining the consent of the setting administrators was also an important ethical consideration, along with the required individual consent forms from the actual participants (Creswell, 2013). These consent forms were written in user-friendly language on a sixth-grade reading level (Creswell, 2013). A signed confidentiality agreement was also obtained from the professional transcriptionist who transcribed the interview sessions (Creswell, 2013). Respecting the rights and privacy of the participants through anonymity, such as using pseudonyms, was also an ethical consideration (Creswell, 2013). The researcher disguised data before it was disseminated to protect against identity theft of any kind. Looking for researcher bias, while attempting to eliminate it as often as possible, was also important so that information was not altered based on such biases (Creswell, 2013). Protecting participant data was and still is a high priority. It has been and will continue to be locked in proper storage areas if in paper form, and password protected if in electronic form (Creswell, 2013). The researcher has and will continue to always

uphold the strictest confidentiality. No influence of the researcher was a problem, as there was no longer an employment connection to the participants.

### **Summary**

In summary, Chapter Three provides a holistic overview of the design of this multiple case study. It reviews the research questions which served to highlight the traditional mentorship program completed by the alternatively certified teacher participants, the suburban school district setting, and the overall list of procedures that were completed in this study. There is also a breakdown of the data collection through document analysis/archival records, field notes/observations, and teacher interviews, as well as the data analysis through a variety of strategies. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness and ethical considerations for this multiple case study regarding the understanding of the impact of a traditional mentorship program on alternatively certified teachers. The goal of the relationship between trustworthiness and ethical considerations was to be able to listen to the participants' experiences, which in turn provided an understanding of a traditional mentorship program, all the while protecting them through strict confidentiality.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

Chapter Four begins with detailed descriptions of the 13 participants utilized in this research. It was imperative to include a clear and rich biography of each participant since the purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. In the results section, this chapter includes two sub-sections of theme development and research question responses. Theme development offers a discussion of the research data collected, to include the codes and themes that emerged, as they relate to the original research questions. This data is presented in various forms to include a narrative with direct participant quotes and tables. Research question responses supply narrative answers to each of the original research questions using the data collected through the themes developed. These responses will also be supported by additional participant quotes.

The central research question that guided this study was:

**RQ #1:** How did participation in a traditional teacher mentorship program in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia impact alternatively certified teachers' success?

Additionally, three sub-questions also assisted the researcher to find answers:

**RQ #2:** How did the participants describe the benefits of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?

**RQ #3:** How did the participants describe the challenges of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program?

**RQ #4:** How did participation in a traditional mentorship program impact the participants' beliefs and assumptions of their classroom experiences?

### **Participants**

This research study utilized 13 participants from five elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools in the Timberlake School District (pseudonym) in southeast Virginia. The elementary schools included Harbor View (pseudonym), Maple Park (pseudonym), Silver Oak (pseudonym), Upper Lake (pseudonym), and West Shores (pseudonym). Middle schools were Enterprise (pseudonym) and Seacoast (pseudonym), and high schools were Eastview (pseudonym) and Heritage (pseudonym). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of all participants. The 13 participants were distributed among the nine schools as follows: one from each of the five elementary schools, four from the middle schools, and four from the high schools. Each of the participants were also assigned a pseudonym for maintaining confidentiality for this study. Table 1 provides a synopsis of the participants, followed by a biography for each one.

Table 1

#### *Participant Synopsis*

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<u>Participant Name (pseudonyms)</u>	<u>Subject Taught</u>	<u>School Name (pseudonyms)</u>
Belinda Eldridge	Special Education	Maple Park Elementary
Bonnie Smith	Special Education	Enterprise Middle
Fran Holland	Biology	Bayside High
Gina Kelley	Special Education	Seacoast Middle
Janet Boris	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	Silver Oak Elementary

Lilly Anderson	Preschool	Harbor View Elementary
Lynette Davis	Biology	Bayside High
Monica Lewis	Vision Impairment	District-wide
Morris Simpson	Special Education	Enterprise Middle
Patrick Jones	Math	Bayside High
Sally Cundiff	Special Education	West Shores Elementary
Wade Jeffreys	Criminal Justice	Eastview High
William Mason	History	Enterprise Middle

### **Belinda Eldridge**

Belinda was originally from West Virginia, but eventually grew up in Timberlake County (pseudonym). Throughout her life, she knew she wanted to have a career in human growth and development, and really wanted to teach. She had even volunteered with students with special needs and had grown to love working with that population. However, after watching her aunt and cousin who were Speech Pathologists, she decided to try the more therapeutic clinical route and earned her undergraduate degree in Speech Therapy. After earning that degree, she decided to take a year off. During that time, she worked for another local school system as an instructional assistant in a Reading Specialist setting. It was at that time that she decided to change course and remain in the area to pursue a career in education.

During her time in college attempting to earn her teacher certification, she decided to continue working in the school system as an instructional assistant. Although the position she was currently in at the time was no longer going to be funded for the next year, she applied to the Timberlake School District and was hired there as an instructional assistant as well. It was that

position that solidified her desire to teach Special Education, as she worked in a classroom alongside another co-teacher in a small group setting and loved it. During her second year in that position, one of the Special Education teachers resigned about six weeks into the school year. Her principal approached her about stepping into the position under a provisional teaching license. Because she was already well under way with her coursework, she had taken the pre-requisite courses needed to obtain this type of licensure in Virginia. She accepted and has been teaching there ever since in the behavioral interventions program. Obtaining her license was a seamless process, one which required her to complete an application and submit all the proper documentation to show the completion of the pre-requisite courses. Once the provisional license in special education was issued, it gave her a three-year window of time and cited her for the remaining courses she needed to complete to be fully licensed in the state of Virginia. These courses were being completed within the program of study in which she was currently enrolled.

Belinda prefers working in a co-teaching setting, where she is with other teachers and instructional assistants, and pulling out students in small groups, as opposed to a self-contained setting. She is very happy that she made a career change and loves her job. At the time of this study, she was a special education teacher in her second year at Maple Park Elementary, with plans to complete her full licensure requirements by August of 2018.

### **Bonnie Smith**

Bonnie has been married for 33 years, has two college-aged sons, and an undergraduate degree in social work. She worked for a private non-profit where she focused on the creation of independent living programs. She dealt with a lot of foster care issues during her time as a social worker, which meant a lot of crisis intervention with at risk populations of youth. Due to the amount of travel with that job, she decided to step back and resign when her sons began middle



school. She became quite bored, so she decided to work as a substitute, then as an instructional assistant at one of Timberlake's high schools for seven years. After her children left home for college, she decided to go into special education because she felt a great connection between that and her previous social work experience.

Before Bonnie fully decided to commit to becoming a teacher, she had a long talk with a local high school assistant principal and began talking with other special education teachers. Once she felt fully committed to reaching her new goal, she decided to give it her all and pursue her new dream. To earn her provisional teaching license in special education, Bonnie had to sign up for and complete the pre-requisite course at a nearby university. Upon completion, she was able to apply for her license and begin teaching, all while working to complete the cited requirements for full licensure in three years. She began teaching at a different middle school in the Timberlake School District, and remained there for her first two years, working mostly as a co-teacher for special education students in English, and occasionally in history.

Bonnie enjoys her job as a special education teacher. She sees a lot of similarities between it and her previous employment as a social worker, as she can help special education students who need extra assistance. She strives to be present in the classroom, learn everything she can, be as helpful as possible, and remain energetic enough to complete her graduate courses to complete her path. At the time of this study, she was a special education teacher in her third year of teaching, but first year at Enterprise Middle. She completed her requirements to become fully licensed in special education and graduated in December of 2017.

### **Fran Holland**

Fran is originally from Illinois, where she earned her graduate degree in Biology. After college, she worked as a genetic engineer for about three years, even earning a patent. Although

she enjoyed the work, Fran often felt unappreciated and had little interaction time with others, which went completely against her personality and nature. She then decided to take a pharmaceutical sales position for the next five years. At this job, she was able to be more social with the nurses and doctors. Once she had children, she decided to stay home for the next 13 years until they all entered school.

Upon the last child entering kindergarten, Fran then turned to education and became an instructional assistant in the Timberlake School District. Although she was not earning much money, and was traveling a lot, due to being split between two schools, she enjoyed the return to being with children daily. She knew teaching was her next step in life. Eventually she was offered a position where she taught biology, anatomy, and ecology. Based on her degree in biology, she only had to take the Praxis II Virginia state exam for that subject. Upon receiving a passing grade, she was able to apply for and receive her provisional teaching license in biology and began teaching. She was only cited for one other state test and three courses to complete her full licensure.

Fran feels as though she is back in her element being around children like she was as a stay-at-home mom for so many years. She missed being around children when hers all began to attend school, so this was the perfect chance to again be able to interact with other youth. This position also gives her the opportunities she missed out on for so many years in her first profession where she can socialize with both children and adults daily, all while feeling good about what she is doing and being appreciated by staff, parents, and students. She has even considered taking the state Praxis II tests for chemistry and math but decided against it because she is so content in the biology realm. At the time of this research, she was teaching biology in

her second year at Bayside High School. Fran plans to complete her missing three courses within the next year or so.

### **Gina Kelley**

Gina earned her undergraduate degree in teaching through a traditional preparation program for Elementary Grades K-5, where she completed student teaching. Soon after graduation, she had her second child of three, and decided to bypass teaching at that time and stay home with her children instead. Later Gina decided to work at a small private preschool for several years. Since she was a little girl, she always wanted to be a mom and a teacher, so after that she worked as an instructional assistant, both in special education and a general capacity, in another county for a short time. This gave her the opportunity to experience the best of both worlds. Once her family relocated back to the area in 2008, she took a job as an instructional assistant in the Timberlake School District, where she worked in both middle and high school, experiencing more of the realm of special education. Due to her experiences in special education, she decided it was time to do something for herself that made her happy, thus began her path to become a teacher.

Upon passing her pre-requisite courses to teach special education on a provisional license, she began teaching collaborative special education as a co-teacher, and at the time of this study, was working in a self-contained classroom alongside multiple instructional assistants. Because of her background in a traditional university elementary education preparation program, she was only cited for about twelve courses and a special reading assessment currently required in Virginia for both elementary and special education teachers. As is common among provisionally licensed teachers, she began the pre-requisite courses at one university, then after being able to shop around for the best value, has transferred to another.

Gina's students have very special needs, and that makes her feel right at home because of her nurturing nature and personality. She loves teaching special education students because she can form such a heartwarming bond with them as she helps them traverse through their school days. She knows a lot of people fear severe and profound special education students because they do not know if they can handle their unique needs. However, Gina says there is nothing to be scared of, but rather you just have to come up with a completely different approach that works for them. She calls her students "the best". At the end of this study, Gina was teaching in her second year of special education at Seacoast Middle. She plans to complete her missing requirements for full teacher licensure very soon.

### **Janet Boris**

Janet was the daughter of two public school teachers from this area. However, her heart was not in it at first, so she spent several years working various jobs, one of which was a pharmacy technician. On his death bed, her father had encouraged her to become a teacher like he and his wife, but Janet still was not sold on the idea completely. She had always known she wanted to be a teacher, but something kept her from making that final decision. Eventually she began school here in Virginia, but when her husband's job transferred them to Alabama mid-stream, she had to work on their specific requirements instead. She completed her licensure in Alabama, but when her husband's job ended there, they decided to move back to Virginia, where she had several requirements to meet in addition to her current licensure.

Upon their return to Virginia, Janet took a job as a long-term substitute at Silver Oak Elementary where she currently teaches. When a full-time second grade position came open, after doing a great job as the long-term sub, she was offered the position, and was able to obtain a provisional license for Virginia, with the missing requirement of the Praxis I. She has been

working on passing that recently and hopes to complete it soon. She joked that she had no problem with the reading and vocabulary sections, but that she could not do math if you paid her. She is currently working to pass this final hurdle. Although landing her new job was a blessing, at the beginning of school she found out she was pregnant. Although a surprise blessing for both she and her husband, she struggled with the idea of all the changes at one time. Luckily, she made it through to the end of the school year before she delivered, and all was well.

Janet and her husband had lost all their stored items when they returned to Virginia, so she was anxious about not having her old teaching supplies and materials that any experienced teacher will tell you is a blessing from God to make things run smoothly. She felt extremely blessed when she found out a teacher who retired had left her everything she had collected over the years. Janet was ecstatic and knew she now had the tools she needed to utilize her passion for teaching to enter the classroom as a full-time teacher with confidence and clarity. As of the time of this research, Janet was in her second year of teaching second grade at Silver Oak Elementary. She plans to continue her quest to pass the Praxis I math portion of the required Virginia exam to earn full licensure as soon as possible.

### **Lilly Anderson**

Lilly completed a short internship in first grade during her senior year in high school. In her hometown, she also worked at the YMCA in their after-school program and with the Boys and Girls Club. She also had experience in working for several preschool programs during this four-year period. She was attending school during all this time as well. She had started in education, then considered switching her major to criminal justice after serving jury duty, and eventually switched to a nursing program after she had her baby and had lost a year of time when she and her family moved. Eventually she decided to switch to a different university to complete

her undergraduate degree in elementary education. At one point, Lilly took a job as a baby sitter for an assistant principal at one of Timberlake's high schools. She soon after began working as an instructional assistant at two different elementary facilities in the Timberlake School District. She worked in the autism program at both schools, until around December of her third year when she was offered a long-term substitute position in preschool at Harbor View Elementary. After that position ended, they offered her the full-time preschool position.

Since Lilly was in the process of completing her undergraduate degree in elementary education when she was offered the position in preschool, she found out she needed additional courses to be able to add the early childhood special education endorsement to her license. Virginia requires this additional endorsement to teach in preschools that are funded by and populated with mostly special education funds and students, even though the elementary endorsement is a PK-6 option. Lilly joined the graduate degree program at a different university to add the remaining requirements for this endorsement. This program will help her complete her missing special education courses specific to preschool needs for which she was cited on her provisional license, as well as pass her three Virginia required assessments for these two endorsements.

Lilly loves her job, mostly because of her students. She knows they have very special needs in the autism classroom, but that is what she enjoys, attending to them and helping them learn just like all the other students. Seeing them finally grasp a concept after weeks of practice is so rewarding for her that she knows she made the right final choice. The preschool autism program is especially near to her heart because she feels like she gets to experience bigger changes over time than if she were to teach regular education students. After several adversities she overcame during her first year, she now feels more confident in her abilities to take these

students to new heights alongside her one-on-one instructional assistants. At the completion of this study, Lilly was teaching her second year in the preschool autism program at Harbor View Elementary. She plans to complete her missing requirements of courses and tests for full licensure in the next year or so.

### **Lynette Davis**

Lynette taught gymnastics since she was in the eighth grade. Her family was full of teachers, from her grandmother, her mother, to countless other aunts and uncles. Teaching was certainly in her blood. However, she decided to go a different route at first, and earned her undergraduate degree in communications and marketing. She worked in this field for quite a long time until the stock market crashed. At that time, she returned to dental hygiene school, where she took countless science courses. Unfortunately, she ended up having two back surgeries, and could no longer sustain either standing or sitting for long periods of time. She needed to find a career where she could alternate as needed. Her heart and mind led her to teaching, and that is where it all began. Due to the multitude of science courses under her belt, that subject seemed like a natural fit for her. She joined a graduate program for teaching biology and began the process towards licensure.

She joined a career switcher program to licensure in Virginia, and was able to transfer in her science coursework, then test for the material she had learned. After she had taken and passed both the required Praxis I general knowledge and Praxis II biology exams, and completed a practicum with students, she applied to the Timberlake School District for a position in biology. She was hired on a provisional career switcher license, which meant she had to teach at least one full year and receive a successful evaluation from the school system before being awarded her full teaching license.

Lynette chose a less common route to alternative licensure than most people by joining a true career switcher program for Virginia licensure. She admitted that it would have been much quicker for her to have gotten a job if she had gone the regular provisional licensure route as many other candidates do. However, she knew in the long run it would be easier to use this method, because she completed all the time-consuming paperwork, testing, and other requirements in advance of teaching. This is the opposite for most provisionally licensed individuals who do not join a true career switcher program. They jump in with the passing of one or two pre-requisite courses, then have paperwork, testing, and coursework to complete while they are trying to acclimate to their new profession of teaching students daily.

Lynette enjoys the career choice she made. Her previous experience working as a gymnastics teacher in her younger years really helped her focus in on students and how they operate. Teaching science just seemed to be a natural fit with her background, and it was nice to know those courses did not go to waste when she had to change her career path due to her medical issues. Having come from a long line of teachers in her family, she knew this was the right final choice for her. It allows her time to spend with her child as well, and still do the fun things she enjoys. Upon completion of this study, Lynette was teaching her second year in biology and ecology at Bayside High. Completion of her first year of teaching in 2016-2017 with a favorable school district evaluation satisfied her only missing requirements for her full licensure in biology.

### **Monica Lewis**

Monica earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology. Over the years she held several jobs such as working as a case manager at a residential care facility and at another home for young teenage girls. She loved working with children, so her next job was as an instructional



assistant for ten years in the Timberlake School District. She worked in many areas of the county with preschool, the library, the autism program, and the reading program. It was through that job that she fell in love with working in the school system. At that point, she thought she wanted to earn her graduate degree in teaching either as a guidance counselor or a librarian. However, just before she decided, she had been placed in a preschool with a vision student. They were looking for someone who was willing to learn Braille during the child's kindergarten year and it sounded like a fun opportunity. As she learned and began to teach Braille, she fell in love with the vision program and knew that was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

She worked closely with the current vision teacher for Timberlake County and learned a lot of information over the years. When she found out that teacher was considering retirement in the upcoming years, she knew she wanted to eventually be her replacement. Because there are so few vision teacher positions in Virginia, it was difficult to find a program where she could complete the needed coursework. Finally, Monica did, and thus began her journey to become the teacher of her dreams down the road. She earned her graduate degree for teacher licensure in special education with an emphasis on visual impairment. During this time, the other visual impairment teacher requested to have Monica as her instructional assistant in the vision program. This allowed her to be mentored on the job while working towards her licensure and new degree. She was issued a provisional license in visual impairment when the numbers increased in the school system and worked to complete her missing requirements.

As she describes it, Monica loves her fascinating job, and could not be happier with her choice of career change. She is still currently working alongside the other vision teacher, who is attempting to phase into retirement very soon. Since there are now 26 visually impaired students in the Timberlake County Schools, another vision teacher will have to be hired once her mentor

retires. Monica will have the opportunity to mentor someone else just as she experienced along her journey. Her passion for teaching is why she loves her job and working with her visually impaired students makes her feel both happy and fulfilled. As of the culmination of this study, Monica was teaching her second year of visual impairment at multiple schools in the Timberlake County Public Schools. She has completed her missing requirements, and now holds full teacher licensure in Virginia for visual impairment PK-12.

### **Morris Simpson**

Morris earned his undergraduate degree and was able to do an internship during his senior year as an instructional assistant intern in an inclusive fourth and fifth grade classroom in Wyoming. After that, he started working for a non-profit program for two years, where he tutored and mentored at-risk youth in Florida. Afterwards, Morris joined the Teachers for America program in New York, but struggled to pass the tests for that program. He relocated to Virginia and sought work as an instructional assistant at one of Timberlake's elementary schools in a self-contained special education setting, working with students with cerebral palsy. At that time, he also went back to school to earn his graduate degree in special education. He had a lot of experience working with kids, so he knew he wanted to eventually become a teacher.

After many frustrating interviews with countless districts and principals, Morris was able to secure a teaching position at Enterprise Middle in Timberlake County. Because a person cannot be issued any type of provisional license without the school district hiring them first and signing off on the application, Morris had to explain this process each time in response to why he did not already hold a current license. He was finally hired on a provisional license for special education. He was able to continue pursuing his degree while working on the completion of his licensure requirements as well.

Morris proclaims that his choice of becoming a special education teacher happened rather organically. He had quite a bit of experience working with middle school aged children in Florida and enjoyed that feeling of satisfaction from helping a young person succeed. During his first year of teaching, he co-taught with a math teacher in grades seven and eight, which ended up being quite a challenge due to the dynamics of his situation. The second year brought co-teaching in an English eight classroom where he felt much more comfortable and enjoyed it a great deal more. Therefore, as of the end of this research, Morris was teaching his second year of special education at Enterprise Middle. He earned his graduate degree in August of 2017, and only needs to pass his last Virginia assessment, called the VCLA, which he plans to do as soon as possible.

### **Patrick Jones**

Patrick earned his undergraduate degree in economics and a graduate degree in theology, where he met his wife in seminary. He worked for a non-profit for a short time, managing their homeless services. After leaving there, he did some consulting with them as well for a year or so. For about five years prior to entering the field of teaching, he had been working on his PhD in public administration and policy. While looking for some type of work while completing his studies, he began coaching high school basketball in the Timberlake School District. Coaching allowed him to realize how much he enjoyed working with children, particularly in a coaching type of job where he was teaching them something.

Eventually he ended up in a class with the Superintendent of Timberlake where he mentioned he might want to go into teaching, and things progressed from there. They talked about his options and decided on math to get into the system. Between the fact that math is a very hard to fill area for school districts and that he had a wealth of math courses completed due

to his undergraduate degree, it seemed like the best way to proceed. With all the math courses Patrick had taken for his economics degree, he was able to successfully pass the Praxis II that Virginia requires to get his provisional license and begin teaching. He was then cited for several missing components which needed to be completed during the next three years.

Patrick is very happy with his new profession. He feels as though teaching is a natural fit for him, especially with all his experience in coaching young people in the past and currently. This has allowed him a good rapport with his students where he feels comfortable with what he is doing and happy that he is giving back in a positive manner. He continues to work on his missing licensure requirements, alongside the completion of his doctorate degree. At the end of this study, Patrick was in his second year of teaching math at Bayside High. He plans to continue working towards his goals over the next couple of years.

### **Sally Cundiff**

Sally decided to return to school while working full-time as an instructional assistant in the Timberlake School District about six years ago. It was difficult because her children were still in school and sports, and her husband worked out of town. However, with the support from her family, she was able to make it work. She had fallen in love with working with children while being an instructional assistant and knew that was the path she wanted to take.

She joined an online licensure program and completed the pre-requisite courses for obtaining a special education position. Unfortunately, this particular university required her to quit her instructional assistant job, so she could complete her student teaching component. Many of the universities allow students to waive this portion until they find a job in teaching, where they can substitute student teaching for their first year of teaching under a provisional license. She did what she had to do and resigned so she could complete the missing requirement. Her

three-year provisional that was issued when she was offered a job teaching self-contained special education in the fifth grade cited her for a few other items. She will not only be licensed in special education, but also in elementary education PK-6.

Sally knew her heart was in the elementary special education realm when she was an instructional assistant. She loves her job and enjoys working with young children to help them realize their potential. Sally makes sure her students know they are not held back by their disabilities, but rather must push forward to accomplish their goals. She is excited about being dual licensed in both special and regular education because it makes her as marketable as she can possibly be. Upon the conclusion of this research, Sally was teaching special education in her second year at West Shores Elementary. She plans to complete her missing testing requirements for full licensure in the very immediate future.

### **Wade Jeffreys**

Wade earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in criminal justice at a Virginia university. While in school, he worked at a foundation through a Methodist church where he tutored and mentored youth in local schools. He later worked as a local police officer for 13 years, during which he served as the resource officer for two years at his current high school. Eventually the criminal justice teacher at that time decided to take an assistant principal position in another school district, and Wade was offered the position. Wade enjoyed working with youth, whether in troubled situations or not, so he knew he was making the right decision by accepting. He began the process of working with the state and the county's licensure specialist to secure his spot.

Based on his degree in criminal justice, was able to secure a provisional teaching license with only minor missing requirements of professional studies and minimal testing. Because his

type of licensure is what is termed a technical license in Virginia, he was only cited for three courses, which is two less than the typical amount of professional studies for other provisionally licensed teachers. His experiences during his resource officer days and other prior law enforcement time with the former teacher and students at Eastview High had prepared him to take on this new adventure with no reservations. He knew that his time with the police department would be a bridge to something in the professional world from where he would retire eventually. In the back of his mind, teaching would be a nice alternative change, and it was working out beautifully.

Wade has thoroughly enjoyed his time in the school system and is happy with his change. Being a teacher gives him a chance to combine his criminal justice knowledge and his love of helping others, particularly mentoring young adults. Wade describes his career change as a great decision and one for which he has absolutely no regrets. Working at Eastview High particularly mixes well with his nurturing personality because it is a technical school, where students attend their home school for basic courses such as English, math, etc., then attend there for whatever area of interest they prefer. The flexible scheduling blocks of time they offer allows him plenty of mentoring time alongside teaching. At the end of this study, Wade was completing his third year of teaching criminal justice at Eastview High. He completed his last of the three courses during the summer of 2017 to ensure full licensure.

### **William Mason**

William grew up in Tennessee and earned his undergraduate degree there in secondary history education 6-12. He had originally entered the engineering program, but the calculus was a little overwhelming. That is when he decided to switch to education and chose history because he loved the subject. He was also pursuing ministry, where his educational background came in

very handy in dealing with the mix of kids. He entered seminary in New Orleans, while working at a tutoring center prior to taking a youth ministry position at a church, where he later transitioned into a pastoral type of role. He then returned to Tennessee and pastored a church until he relocated back to the local area as pastor at another church. It was only after that, he decided to return to his educational background and seek a teaching position in Virginia.

After working with the licensure specialist and the VDOE, William was offered a position to teach middle school history on a provisional license. He did not teach at least three years under his Tennessee license, therefore he was cited for quite a few government courses, as well as testing components. He has been working to complete his missing requirements while teaching full-time and working a part-time job on the side. William's varied experiences in life prepared him well for this new position as a middle school teacher. His love of ministry and of mentoring youth made his decision to return to education a simple one. Impacting students by teaching them life skills and encouraging them to succeed bring him back to work each day with a smile on his face.

William expressed possible interest in administrative duties within the school system down the road, due to his vast array of experiences both in ministry and in the school building as the department chair in leadership roles. Making connections spiritually with his students and interacting with both them and their parents are just some of the many reasons he enjoys his job so much. He loves seeing them at the local home improvement store where he works his part-time job and striking up conversations with them, building bridges all the while. His passions for both educating children and helping them grow spiritually have served him well in his new career. At the culmination of this study, William was teaching sixth grade history and 8<sup>th</sup> grade

civics in his second year at Enterprise Middle. He plans to complete his missing provisional licensure requirements over the next couple of years to obtain full licensure.

## **Results**

A limited number of research questions were utilized to facilitate the purpose of this study, which was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. These questions were formulated based on the literature review results and the need for further study of the experiences of participants during their initial mentorship period. The central research question was chosen as the broader overview of the mentorship program in which the alternatively certified teachers participated. Answers to this question highlighted the overall impact the traditional mentorship program had on the participants and how these qualities impacted their success, by way of developing common themes. The first sub-question allowed the researcher to explore the positive side of combining traditionally and alternatively certified teachers during the mentorship process. The second sub-question explored the challenges that alternatively certified teachers experienced because their mentorship program was not created with their unique needs in mind, regarding the lack of specific components present in traditional teacher preparation college or university programs. The third and final sub-question allowed the information collected from participants to highlight any possible impact of the traditional mentorship program on alternatively certified teachers. The answers to these questions were formulated based on the codes and themes that emerged.

## **Theme Development**

Data collection included the use of document analysis/archival records, teacher interviews, and field notes/observations. Following this collection, data analysis consisted of



preliminary analysis, coding, cross-case synthesis, and naturalistic generalizations. Throughout the preliminary analysis process, repetitive words and phrases were examined through the reading and re-reading of the data collected. Memoing of thoughts during this time also took place as a form of reflection, which lead to the preliminary stages of coding.

During the coding process, commonalities among the repetitive words and phrases began to classify the data through grouping. As further interpretation of the data commenced, approximately 100 codes emerged. After careful consideration of the multitude of initial codes, these were eventually narrowed down to 28 codes that were more manageable. These were determined based on the importance level of each per the number of responses or duplication throughout the entire research process.

Cross-case synthesis utilized single instances, which were examined to establish patterns across the categories. This method allowed the researcher to see similarities and differences in each case, which were translated into commonalities, then evolved into five overarching themes, consisting of meaningful commonalities among the 13 participants and their experiences. Detailed descriptions of each case and the themes within those cases accomplished a method of within-case analysis. At that point, there was thematic analysis across each of the cases, utilizing cross-case analysis. The entire coding process assumed interpretations or assertions of the meaning of each overall case.

The process of forming naturalistic generalizations achieves insight into a subject by reflecting on the details and descriptions of the participants presented in a case study. These generalizations also allowed the researcher to make plausible connections of the data collected. These lead to the implications of study for future research by connecting contexts and settings discussed in Chapter Five.

Below is a table, which summarizes the path, which lead from initial codes to emerged themes:

Table 2

*Codes and Themes*


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Codes	Repetition of Information	Themes
#1 High expectations of students	8	#1 Teacher/Student Interactions
#2 Student centered learning	6	
#3 Behavior management	16	
#4 Offering encouragement and feedback	20	
#5 Good student rapport	19	
#6 Positive student achievement	8	#2 Teaching and Learning Styles
#7 Differentiated instruction	10	
#8 Appropriate and measurable goals	7	
#9 Guiding students to find their own answers	18	
#10 Hands-on instruction	13	
#11 Everyday connections to learning material	13	

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#12 Caring, calm, and patient personalities	15	#3 Personalities, Relationships, and Experiences	
#13 Importance of communication	6		
#14 Engagement with colleagues	10		
#15 Importance of collaboration	13		
#16 Co-teaching with other adults	4		
#17 Prior experience with kids	16		
#18 Prior real-life experiences	12		
#19 Multiple mentor helpfulness	13		#4 Gains and Losses
#20 New teacher trainings usefulness	13		
#21 Summertime options for training	8		
#22 Purposeful professional development	8		
#23 New teacher resource guides	6		
#24 Job shadowing need	11		
#25 Overwhelming to manageable	13	#5 Changes over Time	
#26 Doubtful to confident	11		
#27 Content area fears	6		
#28 Lesson creation and organization	8		

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**Theme #1: Teacher/student interactions.** This theme focused on the building of relationships in the classroom setting that foster learning over time and emerged from a series of codes that outlined common discussion with the participants in how they dealt with their

students. This was demonstrated through multiple data collection tools, including teacher evaluation comments by administrators, interviews, and classroom observations. The first code identified was the mention of high expectations of students by the participants. Bonnie's evaluation noted her demonstration of high expectations of her students, as she required higher level thinking skills of them (TCPS, 2018b). Morris also received a comment on his evaluation stating he supports high expectations of his students, while helping them achieve what many thought they could not do with special needs (TCPS, 2018b). During the classroom observation phase of the research period, Lynette expected great things from her students, as she led them to make their own personal discoveries using art to demonstrate their knowledge of cell division. Lilly professed in her interview that working with students until they finally grasp a concept they never thought they could, and then being so excited about it, made her feel like she was "really doing something great."

In addition to high expectations of students, the second code that emerged to form theme one was student centered learning, used as a common strategy across the cases where teachers strove to make being in the classroom all about the students and their successes along the way. Gina demonstrated this to her administrators, as outlined in her evaluation, by using proper instructional language for her group of special education students (TCPS, 2018b). She focused on student needs and what they required to be successful. One of Wade's evaluations cited that he adjusted his pacing to meet the needs of his students (TCPS, 2018b). Not all his students grasp concepts at the same time, so he tailored his timing to accommodate each one of them. William utilized student designed popsicle sticks in a jar with each one of their names on them to make sure each child had equal opportunity to answer questions and participate in the classroom discussions as they passed it around the room and drew one out each time a question was asked.

This teacher/student interaction theme is also illustrated by the emergence of the third code of behavior management, which was constantly on the minds of each novice teacher as they began their new careers. Some of the participants felt as though they were not fully prepared for this subsection of their skill sets, however many did, based on prior experiences. Although Belinda said she thought she was prepared that first day in the classroom, she really was not. She had to learn to re-direct students and pick her battles with behavior issues, which she demonstrated during her classroom observation. Fran utilized effective behavior management during her observation time by making sure she was present in the classroom from the front to the back of the room, so each student knew she was taking notice of their behavior and task management. Keeping students on task and focused proved to her to be two of the most important factors in classroom behavior management.

Theme one regarding teacher/student interactions was not only identified by high expectations of students, student centered learning, and behavior management. Code four, offering encouragement and feedback to students, which often sets apart teachers regarding their performance in the classroom, was also prevalent during data collection. Janet offered many praise opportunities for her students as they participated in discussions and answered questions correctly during her classroom observation. Monica made sure she interacted with her visually impaired student by correcting her as needed, offering feedback on not only what was wrong with the child's answer, but with suggestions for correction and overall improvement. Making her students comfortable was very important to Monica, as they sometimes felt inadequate around their peers because they cannot see.

As a product of offering encouragement and feedback, the fifth identified code of good student rapport was a common discussion during the interviews and was well evident upon the

culmination of the classroom observations for many of the participants. Both Patrick and Sally taught students every day, but each at different grade level buildings. Patrick's evaluation noted his use of appropriate delivery strategies, which lead to positive student interactions (TCPS, 2018b). He knew a good teacher must find the right combination of instructional delivery and personal respect for students to form a classroom atmosphere that works for both the teacher and the learners. Sally encouraged her students to engage by asking a lot of questions, just like she says she does, because she is "always learning" and wants them to learn that valuable skill as well.

Theme one regarding teacher/student interactions was developed rather organically through the discussions, observations, and evaluations of each participant. Five codes including high expectations of students, student centered learning, behavior management, offering encouragement and feedback, and good student rapport are highly important and utilized skills and techniques of successful teachers. The alternatively certified teachers who participated in this study have learned to focus in on each of these without having graduated from a traditional teacher preparation program immediately precluding their first-year teaching experience.

**Theme #2: Teaching and learning styles.** This theme developed from codes that determined multiple methods of making sure students are given every opportunity available to take control of their education with the guidance of their teachers. Teaching and learning variations combine to assist in the improvement of student achievement. This theme was clear through multiple data collection tools, including student achievement data, teacher evaluation comments by administrators, interviews, and classroom observations. The sixth code identified, positive student achievement, is always the goal of education, but seeing results is not always easy. Bonnie has certainly worked hard on reaching this goal. Administrative comments on her

evaluation offered a statement supporting overall student growth on day-to-day classroom testing of her special education students (TCPS, 2018b). Patrick's Algebra I student scores showed an 81.80% overall score, while his Algebra II student scores highlighted an even higher rate of 92.60% (TCPS, 2018b). Fran demonstrated a 97.72% overall score for her Pre-AP Biology students and 60.87% for her general education students (TCPS, 2018b).

Positive student achievement often stems from the seventh code of differentiated instruction, identified by the participants. This is the idea of tailoring instruction to meet the needs of students with different learning styles. Since there are seven types of learners, each style must be assessed in comparison to the student, thus yielding the proper method: visual/spatial, aural/auditory-musical, verbal/linguistic, physical/kinesthetic, logical/mathematical, social/interpersonal, and/or solitary/intrapersonal. Gina worked with a group of very challenging special education students with many unique needs. She not only had to strive to differentiate instruction for academic reasons, but also for social skill development, which is noted as an accomplishment on her evaluation (TCPS, 2018b). Monica was also cited on her evaluation for the use of differentiated instruction as a great tool to enhance performance, while specifically noting a variety of instructional strategies utilized daily (TCPS, 2018b).

This second theme of teaching and learning styles also incorporated code number eight of appropriate and measurable goals, which must also be instituted for a teacher to accurately assess students. William's administrator noted on his evaluation how appropriate and measurable his student goals were (TCPS, 2018b). He ensured that each student had an equal chance of learning and succeeding by making sure his instruction matched that goal. Belinda incorporated the use of online testing for her special education students during her classroom observation. Each goal outlined on the test had been aligned with what she and her co-teacher had taught them.

Positive student achievement using differentiated instruction and using appropriate and measurable goals are not the only codes that illustrate theme number two of teaching and learning styles. In setting appropriate and measurable goals for their students, teachers must also be pros at code number nine by guiding students to find their own answers. This skill is important, because while students can benefit from assistance, they do not benefit from being given the answers outright. Morris demonstrated a healthy knowledge of this strategy when observed by walking around the room helping students who were working on various projects on the laptops. He made sure to encourage them to help each other with tasks that were more difficult, and offered his own hints as needed. He made sure to avoid giving direct answers, which would have allowed students to give up. Sally's self-contained special education classroom gave her plenty of opportunity to guide her students to the answers without simply doing the work for them. She was able to speak directly to each of them in this small group setting and encourage them to keep trying if they had issues with any questions.

Students will be more likely to enjoy being guided to find their own answers if they are the recipients of code number ten that was identified, hands-on instruction. This technique is a wonderful way to keep students involved, instead of allowing them the opportunity to say they are bored. Janet's use of math manipulatives with her second graders proved beneficial during her classroom observation. The tens rods for counting interested the students, and they therefore remained engaged the entire lesson. She continued this method with student interaction by allowing them to physically get up to come to the smart board and use the special pen to choose answers. Physical engagement of any kind typically intrigues students more than simple lecturing. Wade was also a master at hands-on teaching by allowing part of the classroom to work on laptops to complete an assignment, but having others come up in small groups to learn



how to use handcuffs. The small group students appeared to be engaged the entire time and were enjoying their instruction, as it was meaningful to them and their criminal justice curriculum.

Tied closely to hands-on instruction, the eleventh code of everyday connections to learning material are yet another method that holds students' attention. They feel that meaningfulness, just as they do with the hands-on instruction. Lynette demonstrated use of this technique by discussing cell division in relation to breaking in half a cotton batting typically used for facial cleansing. You could see this made more sense to some of the students than the textbook definition of this topic prior to her real-life example. Morris used an analogy of a sandwich to explain the introduction, body, and conclusion process in writing. This was something that made sense to the student and he was able to move forward with his work. Patrick had many football players in his classroom the day he was observed, so he was able to connect football to the literal equations samples he was demonstrating on the board.

Theme two emerged through the student achievement data, discussions, observations, and evaluations of each participant. Positive student achievement is often accomplished with differentiated instruction, the use of appropriate and measurable goals, guiding students to find their own answers, hands-on instruction, and the use of everyday connections to learning material. These alternatively certified teachers certainly understood these concepts as they applied to their daily interactions with students.

**Theme #3: Personalities, relationships, and experiences.** This theme established itself from codes that define who a person is, how they interact with others, and events that have shaped them over time. The combination of the three defines how a teacher functions and succeeds. This theme was viewed through multiple data collection tools, including interviews and classroom observations. It is certainly no secret that a teacher's personality traits can affect

their interaction with students in the classroom. Code number twelve of having a caring, calm, and patient personality can put students at ease and make them feel as though they can succeed if they try; because they know they have someone there to help make that happen. Gina had a very comforting voice when she interacted with her students during her observation. It was clear the students felt safe and secure in her room as she and the instructional assistants guided them through their work. Lilly demonstrated a very calm demeanor with her preschool children, who due to their autism, have some very challenging behaviors the teacher and instructional assistants dealt with daily. She was patient during her observation, and no matter how much she had to deal with a disruptive child, she continued to model appropriate behavior and encourage students to behave.

Although having a caring, calm, and patient personality is important for a teacher, the importance of communication, code number thirteen, is also paramount to a successful teacher. Communication must exist between the teacher and many other stakeholders in the educational process: students, parents, other teachers, and administration. Of course, the communication must also be meaningful to be worthwhile and beneficial to all parties involved. The use of assigned mentors during the initial year of teaching helps make this happen. Although some teachers interviewed during this research admitted that not all mentor/mentee assignments were helpful, many were. Janet was extremely pleased with the contact she had with her district level mentor, a retired teacher. She saw this mentor every other Monday in person, and they emailed frequently. They built a close relationship that was helpful to Janet, but she never felt smothered by the presence of another person. Monica was lucky in that her mentor was working right alongside her as the other vision impairment teacher for the district. Her mentor was “very

patient, explained things to her, slowly gave her more responsibility, and eventually transitioned students to her over time”.

While general communication is important, code fourteen, actual conversational engagement with colleagues, is often seen as a natural way to offer mentorship. It is also a way to simply decompress and talk with someone who understands the life one experiences daily in a profession such as teaching. Lynette felt that her other building level teachers were her best natural mentors throughout her first year of teaching. Although she had other assigned mentors in the building and the district, she felt that other teachers were able to be the “most helpful” of everyone, and she was most comfortable talking to them. William was able to share resources with his other building level colleagues. They shared materials that made his life easier as a new teacher. Over time he built several strong relationships, and eventually even participated in a classroom swap with one of the teachers.

The importance of collaboration, code fifteen, ties in with communication and colleague engagement, as it requires people to work together to reach the same educational goal of student success. They are each a key component to this third theme of personalities, relationships, and experiences. Belinda mentioned that she “academically felt like she was drowning” during the initial weeks of teaching. Although she was the special education teacher in a co-taught setting with another content teacher, she still needed to know what was being taught to best assist her students. She utilized collaboration with other general education teachers in her school to put her mind at ease, where she then felt like she was part of a team. Sally recognized her entire fifth grade team of teachers as some of her best mentors during the first year. She noted they were a “good support system, alongside the other special education teachers” who helped answer her questions and guide her along the way.

While collaboration is important, the sixteenth code of co-teaching with other adults can produce amazing results, but also be stressful at times. Typically, these situations exist when there is a content area general education teacher and a special education teacher working side by side in a classroom. It can also exist on a slightly different level between a teacher and an instructional assistant. Lilly said her biggest struggle the first year was learning how to supervise an entire group of one-on-one instructional assistants for each of her students. She had never thought about having to manage adults, just children. Although she struggled at first, she now knows that if “you have a passion and desire to teach, you can get it done, no matter what”. She has learned how to talk to and with her instructional assistants, so they share a mutual respect and can focus on the students. Bonnie typically worked in co-taught situations with other general education teachers. She constantly worked on learning more about the content from her co-teachers and through her college courses. Bonnie said she felt like she was “constantly absorbing new things” by working with her co-teachers and felt more like part of a team.

In addition to personalities and relationships in theme three, a person’s previous experiences also help mold a person and project onto their performance, especially for a teacher working with students. The seventeenth code identified of prior experience with kids, regardless of what form, seemed to help many of these participants feel more comfortable in the classroom. Although many of the teachers interviewed mentioned their shear and utter chaotic feelings on their first day of school as a teacher, Patrick said “the first day was pretty much what I expected.” He credits his overall comfort level to his prior coaching experience with youth. This gave him the opportunity to bond with young people and understand how they process instruction to learn in the end. Wade felt very similarly to Patrick, in that he had two years of working as the school resource officer at his high school, while working for the police

department. He had already built some relationships with students, so he felt very comfortable with them in the classroom. Although he feared other new teacher duties, such as filling a three hour and 30-minute period per class, working with the children before left him confident in dealing with that part.

Similar to prior experience working with children, prior real-life experiences, or code eighteen, can also add to someone's comfort level as a new second career teacher. Fran's real-life experiences in the genetic engineering and pharmaceutical worlds helped her feel extremely confident about her content knowledge, therefore eliminating some of the fear she might ordinarily have had without them. She never had to worry about making everyday connections to biology, because she had lived those connections and could explain them to her students. William's experience working with youth as a pastor helped him make connections with his students from the very start. He knew how to not only educate them, but also to help them grow spiritually at the same time. His comfort level on that first day was defined by his ministry edge and it allowed him to focus on other areas such as planning, setting rules, and other administrative tasks.

Theme three developed through the discussions and observations of each participant. From personalities, relationships, and experiences, a new teacher enters the profession with a wealth of pre-determined but also yet-to-be determined factors that can certainly affect the success level. Having a caring, calm, and patient personality, understanding the importance of communication, being able to engage with other colleagues, collaborating with others, focusing on effective co-teaching with other adults, and having both prior experiences with children and real-life scenarios, can all shape a novice teacher into a seasoned one over time, and it all begins with that first year.

**Theme #4: Gains and losses.** This theme advanced itself from codes that demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of a traditionally designed mentorship program as viewed through the eyes of alternatively certified teachers. This shows a mixed array of good things and bad that stem from a traditionally designed mentorship program. This theme evolved through multiple data collection tools, including administrative comments on evaluations, interviews, and observations. One focus of this research revolved around the use of multiple mentors for new hire teachers. The nineteenth code of multiple mentor helpfulness comments varied across the participant interviews. Morris detailed his experiences with the tiered mentorship program. His building level mentor was the department chair, who was a wonderful advocate for him, helping with the writing and implementation of individual education programs (IEPs) and other important special education requirements. The district level retired mentor assigned to him was not very helpful, although a very nice person. Not having a special education background for the retirees that participated in this plan made it difficult for them to mentor effectively according to him. Morris also maintained several natural mentors such as the principal and other teachers in the building, who were supportive and helpful when he needed them. Janet had a very successful experience with her mentors overall. She saw her district level retired mentor frequently and emailed back and forth with her as needed. Her building level mentor was the reading specialist, whom she met with every Thursday. Because she offered feedback after sitting in on her reading groups, Janet now feels confident in her reading program.

In addition to the use of multiple mentors, the twentieth identified code of usefulness of new teacher trainings was a topic on which many of the participants took issue. For the most part, the majority agreed that the initial new hire orientation was helpful. This was a meeting where all new teachers came together and discussed general administrative tasks, were introduced

to central office staff, asked questions, learned about benefits, and heard about other topics of interest. However, many took issue with three additional days of training guided by a paid speaker. Gina for example, would have rather been teaching during those three sessions. She felt they were a waste of time, and she would have preferred to be in the classroom with her students. After all, she had heard most of the information offered as a former instructional assistant, as had many of the other participants who had transitioned from those types of jobs into teaching. Belinda believed the additional three trainings were unhelpful as well. She believed the instructor was not well planned, and consistently strayed off topic, particularly self-promoting himself and his resources. She mentioned how difficult it was to be a brand-new teacher and having to figure out what types of lesson plans to leave when she attended the trainings. She too would have rather been in the classroom, or possibly received trainings more specific to her special education position (i.e. trainings on the creation and implementation of IEPs, Synergy, or others).

As a possible way to overcome the identified issues with the new teaching trainings, code twenty-one offered summertime options for the training of new teachers, which were discussed multiple times during the interview portions of data collection. Lynette discussed the feasibility of teachers having the ability to have their textbooks over the summer prior to their first year of teaching as a possible benefit. She also felt like too many new teacher meetings at the building level, and throughout the year at the district level, took away from her ability to remain consistent. One of her suggestions was to have some of the new teacher trainings during the summer prior to the start of the new teachers' school year. This would not only help with time issues, but also with having the information ahead of time, making it more helpful throughout the school year. Wade even mentioned the idea of having district level employees, like those in the

informational technology department meet up with new teachers over the summer to train on topics such as the use of Synergy, Blackboard, Smart Boards, and others. This would allow the teacher to be more prepared ahead of time, and again save on out of the classroom time during the actual school year.

Theme four of gains and losses highlights the use of multiple mentors, and new teacher trainings with summertime options, but also intends to discuss the twenty-second code of purposeful professional development, which became a topic of discussion during several of the interviews. Throughout the ages, teachers of all levels of seniority have commiserated about the overwhelming amount of what they deem “useless” professional development sessions they are required to attend (Kuzle & Biehler, 2015). Teachers long for professional development that is specifically tied to their own classrooms and content areas (Liu et al., 2015). The new teachers that were interviewed focused in on the fact that if there had to be required new teacher training sessions, why not tailor those to the specific needs of the teachers. Lilly for example, mentioned that as a preschool autism teacher, many of the sessions are not helpful to her and her students. She would have preferred more tailored trainings such as ones demonstrating active restraint, specific special education trainings for autism, adult management for those who work directly with other professionals in the classroom, or trainings that might offer suggestions on how to talk to parents, and documenting data for future use. By not having many of these conversations in a traditional college preparation program, Lilly missed a lot of that information. Monica too would have liked to have seen more training regarding IEPs, Synergy, data sheets, and others. As a former instructional assistant for many years, and as a very specific type of special education teacher for visual impairment, she simply felt she experienced a lot of repetitive training, as well as things that did not apply to her situation.



While the creation and implementation of purposeful professional development for new hires is important, there are several other resources suggested by the participants. One such resource was code twenty-three, new teacher resource guides, which were mentioned throughout the participant interviews. Special education teachers were all given a large binder of information that was extremely helpful to each of them. Sally felt as if all the documents in the binder helped her when she needed to refer to them for answers to her questions or to use some of them as templates for items she had to create on her own. There were documents in the binder referring to IEPs, special education rules and regulations, and more. As a regular education biology teacher, Fran had wished she had something like what the others described in the special education binders. Having some type of checklist of tasks she should have been completing along the way that first year would have been very helpful. Some items were included in their new teacher packets that were given to them at the initial orientation meeting but having the specific checklist would have allowed her to feel more focused and know that she was on track with all her daily duties.

Code twenty-four is yet another participant suggestion of job shadowing, which is utilized for multiple reasons, from people making sure they want to take a job before they accept a position, to those who already have a job, but want to improve their skills by watching more seasoned veterans at work. In the teaching profession, time off to do the latter is often difficult to come by. However, some of the participants in this study felt as though being able to observe other teachers would be a wonderful addition to their mentorship program. Bonnie believed that job shadowing within her own school building or in other schools would have been very helpful to her in the early stages of her teaching career. Gina discussed the experience in the classroom piece being missing when she started teaching, so she had to “explore things for herself.”

Watching other teachers in action would have offered her new ideas, ways to counter problems she might incur, and many other tips and tricks for the classroom.

Theme four of gains and losses evolved through the discussions and observations of each participant. Regardless of how hard someone works to make a situation successful for them, or of how many supports they are offered, there are bound to be both gains and losses in the end. Multiple mentors, new teacher trainings, summertime training opportunities, purposeful professional development, resource guides, and job shadowing are all topics that new alternatively certified teachers are passionate about and have opinions which they shared.

**Theme #5: Changes over time.** This theme ensued from codes revolving around topics such as changes in teachers' views of themselves from being overwhelmed to manageable, and from being doubtful to confident, as well as views on content area fears, lesson creation, and organization issues. Strengths and weaknesses based on outcomes stemming from traditional mentorship program participation are highlighted here. This theme evolved through multiple data collection tools, including administrative comments on evaluations and interviews. Reflecting on one's first day on a new job, to current feelings after a year or two, can certainly demonstrate a wide array of feelings, hopefully transgressing from negative to positive connotations. Many of the participants in this study attested to feeling extremely overwhelmed on that first day in the classroom, code twenty-five. Thoughts of doubt haunted Lilly regarding the management of all the adults in her room, all while she was dealing with the general under confidence of being a new teacher. Although she had a small amount of prior experience as a long-term substitute, she still knew it would not be easy. The "honeymoon phase" would only last about a day or so. However, by the end of that first full year, she felt that all aspects of her days as a teacher were much more manageable with the confidence she had built. Morris too,

stated he could not even sleep the night before his first day because he was so excited and nervous about the overwhelming thoughts of teaching. Today he has more confidence overall, therefore feels like teaching is much more manageable for him, even though he knows he still has a lot to learn. He wants to be a true “connector for kids, parents, and the school” by being the best teacher he can be as a lifelong learner.

Along the same lines of transitioning from feelings of being overwhelmed to those which are more manageable, some participants struggled at first with being doubtful of themselves and their abilities in the classroom. The unspoken goal, of course, was to become more confident in themselves after that first year as teachers, utilizing the supports available to them. These feelings formed code twenty-six. Gina mentioned her anxiety, nervousness, and uncertainty upon entering the school as a teacher, and no longer as an instructional assistant. She did not have a lot of confidence on that first day. However, once she made it through that first year, she knew this was what she was meant to be, a teacher helping others be the best they could be. Her confidence level soared as she learned more information and experimented with handling tough situations on her own. She felt like between her mentorship program and her college coursework, she had all the support she needed. Monica felt basically the same way; that she started off nervous and doubtful of her abilities to do as good a job as her mentor had been doing, but ended up feeling confident and eager to continue to learn more through the years to come. She even looks forward to being a mentor to the next teacher when she is hired, once her mentor retires soon. The confidence she gained has prepared her for a new role to which she looks forward.

Feeling overwhelmed and doubtful of one’s capabilities can also lead to code twenty-seven, having content area fears, which had set in for several of the special education teacher

participants at the beginning of the school year when they started. Eventually those fears dissipated for many of them, which was apparent in their interviews. These codes certainly demonstrate this fifth theme of changes over time. While Janet felt confident in her general teaching capabilities such as classroom management, it was not quite the same with her content teaching confidence for reading. However, after working closely with her reading specialist mentor, she ended the school year feeling like she knew what she was doing and that her reading groups were set up and functioning as they should. Belinda too struggled with her content knowledge at the beginning, but due to a lot of collaboration with the general education teachers in her school, she felt much more confident in her abilities by the end of that first year. Being part of a team of teachers, she knew she had the support of others if she later struggled somewhere else in the process.

Changing over time from negative feelings of their success levels to more positive ones also impacted the twenty-eighth and final code of lesson creation and organization, which were topics that initially concerned some of the beginning teachers from this study. Bonnie's evaluation noted her abilities to be organized, which followed a set routine, but one that could also be flexible as needed (TCPS, 2018b). Her lifelong learner attitude also noted by her administrator highlighted the fact that she used instructional strategies in lesson creation that matched her students' learning styles and offered them personalized instruction at the same time. Although Lynette had prior experience teaching children gymnastics and as a science tutor, she still cried on the first day of school because she "felt everything went wrong." However, after making it through that first day, and eventually that first year of trial and error, she felt more prepared in her lesson planning and was much more organized. She knows each year will

require revisions, regardless of how prepared she feels, but now she knows she can adjust as necessary.

Theme five of changes over time transpired through the evaluations, discussions, and observations of each participant. No matter the teacher, no matter the students, each situation in the classroom is going to be different, presenting highs and lows day-to-day for both stakeholders. Teachers feeling overwhelmed and doubtful can transform over time to feeling like things are manageable and that they can be confident. Content area fears can be extinguished with collaboration and eagerness to learn, and effective lesson creation and organization can be tools that novice teachers can use to evolve into veteran experienced ones over time.

### **Research Question Responses**

Research questions were chosen for this study based on the purpose, which was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. One central research question was chosen as the broader overview of the mentorship program in which the alternatively certified teachers participate. The answer to this question presents the reader of this research with the overall impact a traditional mentorship program had on the participants and how it impacted their success as a teacher.

**Central research question.** The central research question for this study focused on participation of alternatively certified teachers in a traditional teacher mentorship program. Themes one through three encompass the answer to this question. Theme one of teacher/student interactions provided data regarding high expectations that these teachers set for their students, the student-centered learning they created in their lesson planning, their effective styles of

behavior management, how they offered encouragement and feedback to their students, and their abilities to have good rapport with them. Cross-case synthesis of the 13 participants drew conclusions of commonalities from the limited student achievement data received, the teacher evaluations, the interviews, and the observations that supported each of the codes, which lead to this theme. Setting high expectations of students and offering a student-centered learning environment in the classroom by a teacher, leads to success as proven on many of the teachers' evaluations. Administrators frequently noted these two traits on evaluations such as that of Bonnie, Morris, and William (TCPS, 2018b). Those teachers each structure their classrooms to ensure students are top priority and that they are set up for success with each lesson. They also expect the best from their students, holding them to a high-performance standard, allowing them to build their own sense of self-confidence so they know they can do it. Patrick sought advice from other colleagues prior to his first day in the classroom regarding maintaining good classroom behavior management from the very start. On his first day, he worked on establishing initial boundaries with a clearly defined set of rules. Belinda walked around her classroom during testing, offering encouragement when one of them struggled to answer a question, and gave feedback through positive reinforcement when she could tell they were trying their best. Gina had a great rapport with her students, joking with them as appropriate, but comforting them when needed. She stated that she "loves coming to work each day and spending time with her students" and that all students can learn, even if "some students require different ways of learning."

Theme two encompassed teaching and learning styles, and through interviews, observations, and document analysis, participants identified six areas that define a successful teacher: positive student achievement, differentiated instruction, appropriate and measurable

goals, guidance of students to find their own answers, hands-on instruction, and everyday connections to learning material. Ensuring positive student achievement as measured by test scores and other such data is how many Americans judge a successful teacher, although there are many other often-overlooked factors. Patrick, Fran, Bonnie, and Monica were all cited for positive student achievement through some type of student assessment during their first or second year of teaching (TCPS, 2018b). This concrete form of validation stems from various steps taken to get to that point. Although no testing data was available for the other participants due to several factors covered earlier, many of them still demonstrated those steps. For example, Janet demonstrated during her observation period the use of differentiated instruction through direct instruction, smart board activities, the use of tens rods, and follow-up worksheets for practice purposes. Her self-described “passion and desire to teach” allows her to enter the classroom ready to teach each student. Working one-on-one with a student during part of her observation time, Lilly made sure she set appropriate and measurable goals for her student to be able to grasp a concept he had missed while absent from school. She was not giving up until he had mastered the concept. While guiding her students to find their own answers during a fill-in-the-blank reading activity while being observed, Sally made sure to avoid simply giving them the answers. She stated she “does not turn away help from anyone for anything” for herself, so she certainly is not opposed to helping other students find their own way. Lynette modeled hands-on instruction in her classroom by allowing her students to draw pictures of the cells they were studying with erasable markers on their desks. She followed up by allowing them to take pictures of the labeled parts on their cell phones to take home to study. Student buy-in with lessons such as this is always high, thus adding to the teacher and student success factor in the classroom. By utilizing his prior experiences as both a police officer and school resource officer,

Wade searches frequently for small group activities to keep his students physically engaged so he can make everyday connections to the prescribed criminal justice curriculum he is required to teach. He is quoted as saying, “begin with the end in mind,” which is ultimately the concept of students absorbing and understanding the material being taught.

The third theme regarding personalities, relationships, and experiences, also lends itself well to characteristics of a successful teacher. The personalities of new teachers determine how they form relationships with others, which in turn lead to the type of experiences they encounter over time through seven identified links: caring, calm, and patient personalities, importance of communication, engagement with colleagues, importance of collaboration, co-teaching with other adults, prior experience with kids, and prior real-life experiences. Caring, calm, and patient personalities are able to nurture students, which make them feel safe and supported in their learning environment. Both Gina and Monica work with very specialized populations of students. Gina serves a severe and profound group of special education students and Monica serves the visually impaired children. It is apparent from seeing both teachers with their students that they are perfect for the positions they serve daily. It would be remiss at this point to not mention how dedicated each of the 13 participants in this study are to their students. Not only do their personalities serve them well in this profession, but also their use of important strategies along the way. Fran is the perfect example of someone who knows the value of communication with others. Not only does she enjoy it, she feels it is of the utmost importance to have successful relationships such as those between mentors/mentees, general colleagues, students, parents, and others. Belinda spent quite some time working with general education teachers during her first year to ensure she felt more comfortable with the content she was helping to teach. Therefore, she knows the value of engaging with colleagues to ensure success. The



importance of collaboration is not lost on Lilly. After the difficulties she encountered at first with her classroom instructional assistants, learning to manage them, coupled with working alongside them, she has learned lessons that will take her far. Unfortunately, Morris did not have the most profitable experience during his first year of teaching in a co-taught situation, as he was not even recognized as an actual teacher in front of the students. He had to adapt to working alongside an unwilling partner until he was finally given the opportunity to have a true collaborative co-teaching relationship the next year. As relationships are formed in teaching, both with students and adults, teachers who are successful often have prior experience with children and/or prior real-life experiences that have proven to be an asset in the classroom. Sally, along with other participants in this study, knows the value of raising children and the experiences that brought to their alternative career choice of teaching. Having other jobs where you work with children is valuable, but raising them daily in your home offers just as much experience to the classroom. Tied to the experience factor, Bonnie brought prior real-life experiences to her ability to succeed in teaching. She worked in several places with youth, many of which came from troubled homes and had no one to care about them but her and the staff where she worked. Assisting children who need additional supports, such as her special education students, was in her field of expertise, and it has shown in her success as a teacher. Next, the first sub-question allowed the researcher to explore the positive side of combining traditionally and alternatively certified teachers during the mentorship process.

**Sub-question one.** The first sub-question asked how the participants described the benefits of participating in a traditional mentorship program. Theme four, gains and losses, helps answer this question because both arise from participation in a teacher mentorship program. This sub-question's answer specifically supplies the reader with the positive gains side

of theme four including those related to multiple mentor helpfulness, new teacher trainings usefulness, summertime options for training, and new teacher resource guides. Many of the participants found portions of the mentorship program to be very helpful to them, such as Lilly who enjoyed the use of multiple mentors throughout her process. Her retiree, although not a former special education teacher, was very helpful with the gathering of material resources such as craft supplies for her students. Her building level special education coordinator and her principal were both instrumental in answering questions when she needed them as well. The use of other special education teachers as resources was also a smart move on her part. They provided a wealth of information that helped her stay focused and were helpful to her students and their special needs.

In addition to the multiple mentor strategy utilized in this mentorship program, there were also several new teacher trainings throughout the initial school year. Although many of the participants were not pleased with the three additional training days conducted by the outside speaker, William said he “felt like a sponge, soaking up as much information as possible.” He felt as though the alternatively certified teachers probably took more away from the trainings than the traditionally certified ones due to their prior background knowledge from college courses. Some participants wished there had been summertime opportunities for the trainings; Sally was perfectly content with attending during the school year. She did admit however, that at first, that was not the case. However, once she realized how much she learned, she was fine with it. Gina was even able to participate in several summer offerings for pre-teaching training on topics such as Synergy, data collection, and others. This was helpful to her, even though it encumbered part of her summertime.

In addition to the mentors and training opportunities, Monica was pleased with another resource that most special education teachers were happy with, their own binder of information relating to their specific needs such as tips, meeting outlines, and much more. This came in handy throughout the year when her mentor was either not available, or she simply wanted to figure something out on her own. Monica was also able to do her own type of job shadowing when she became an instructional assistant for the other vision teacher prior to being offered a teaching position. This arose naturally for Wade, who was able to shadow the former criminal justice teacher prior to taking the position due to his active involvement as the school resource officer. He learned a lot about the process of teaching during this two-year period. Next, the second sub-question explored the challenges that alternatively certified teachers experienced because their mentorship program was not created with their unique needs in mind, regarding the lack of specific components present in traditional teacher preparation college or university programs.

**Sub-question two.** The second sub-question asked how the participants described the challenges of participating in a traditional mentorship program. As with the first sub-question, theme four of gains and losses also answers this question by supplying the reader with the negative side of multiple mentor helpfulness, new teacher trainings usefulness, summertime options for training, purposeful professional development, new teacher resource guides, and job shadowing needs. The use of the word “losses” in this theme refers to the components of the traditional mentorship program that were either not helpful, did not work as intended, or could be supplemented. In response to how participants felt about the multiple mentor levels in the program, Wade was a little skeptical of the fact that his district level retiree visited him a few times until about December or January of his first year, then he never saw that person again. He

felt like there should have been continued follow-up, at least for the remainder of the first year. He could only surmise that perhaps the mentor felt he was doing a good enough job that it was no longer needed.

In addition to the weaknesses of the multiple mentor program, there were some issues addressed regarding the new teacher trainings throughout the initial school year, the missing opportunities during the summer prior to teaching, and ensuring the construction of purposeful professional development targeted to specific needs of alternatively certified new hires. Janet wished those could have come earlier in the process, perhaps during the summertime prior to the first year of teaching. Having information on important topics before one enters the classroom would have been more helpful. Belinda suggested the use of a small mentor group that might meet in the summertime ahead of teaching to share resources, knowledge, best practices, and more. Patrick surmised that purposeful training targeted at curriculum delivery, classroom behavior management, and other important topics be covered at the beginning of the school year as well. For an alternatively certified teacher, this would be especially helpful due to the lack of those types of courses that traditionally certified teachers have already taken prior to starting their employment.

Finally, two other weaknesses were highlighted in theme four, gains and losses, with new teacher resource guides and job shadowing needs. Lynette highlighted the lack of some type of question and answer document for all teachers that might act as a directory of sorts, like that which was given to special education teachers. This could act as a trouble-shooting guide for teachers when they needed guidance on a topic or needed to know who to contact with certain questions. While the resource guide would be helpful, Fran also concluded that more opportunities to network with other teachers, both new hires and seasoned veterans, would offer

more opportunity to share information, best practices, and more. Observing teachers from other schools would be beneficial to gain insight on other ways of doing things, and to avoid becoming stale in the classroom. However, each participant who mentioned the need for job shadowing also noted the complexity of this type of opportunity regarding classroom coverage and additional time out of their own classroom.

**Sub-question three.** The purpose of sub-question three was to explore if participants' beliefs and assumptions of their classroom experiences were impacted by participation in a traditional mentorship program. Theme five, changes over time, encompassed the participants' responses that summed up those beliefs and assumptions during their first year or years of teaching: transforming from feelings of being overwhelmed to more manageable ones, moving from doubtful to confident, dealing with content fears, and honing lesson creation and organization. Janet and Lynette both talked about how they felt overwhelmed at the beginning, both with varying fears of how they measured up to the demanding requirements of being a teacher. Luckily, Janet felt more prepared and things seemed manageable when she was given all the supplies from a former retired teacher. The fact that she did not go into labor until after school ended also helped her stay focused on her new employment, so she was able to get one full year completed and knew what was required during a regular school year cycle. Although Lynette was very doubtful on that first day, and even during that first week when it felt like she had worked nearly 80 hours instead of what she had, she became more confident over time, utilizing all her supports and resources. After all, she knew she had chosen the right profession after her years of other life experiences, so she was "doing it for the right reasons" and could eventually feel comfortable and successful.

Theme five, changes over time, allowed these participants to focus not only on transformations from overwhelming to manageable and doubtful to confident, but also on content area fears for special education teachers. Several of them identified that being a special education teacher and teaching content was difficult and drained their self-confidence. Fortunately, these feelings have been nullified over time, as they have become more comfortable with the material and their students in the classroom setting. Utilizing other teachers in the school, Morris was able to stop internalizing his fears of not being comfortable with certain general education content area subjects. Tied to confidence in what one is teaching is the idea of lesson creation and overall organization. Although William felt comfortable with his classroom management skills from the start, he was not quite as secure in whether he had created a lesson plan with enough for the students to do in the time allotted, or if it would have a good flow that would keep it student centered. Organizing his lessons to ensure this would happen naturally happened over time, which helped him feel more successful in the classroom than even before.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four served multiple purposes in this manuscript, beginning with personal biographies for each of the 13 participants who were alternatively certified teachers new to the teaching profession. The results offered a theme development section where the 28 codes were narrowed down to five emerged themes that encompassed the most common responses and notes across cases with each participant. These included the analysis of each form of data collected through document analysis/archival records, teacher interviews, and field notes/observations. Preliminary analysis, coding, cross-case synthesis, and naturalistic generalizations accomplished the data analysis stage and were summarized in this chapter. Next came the research question results for both the central research question and the additional three sub-questions that followed.

The culmination of this chapter assisted the researcher in fulfilling the purpose of this study, which was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program on 13 alternatively certified teachers in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia. Using participant interviews, review of field notes/archival records, and classroom observations, four overarching research questions that were used to guide the research were answered. These answers were based on multiple codes which emerged into five main themes. Chapter Five consists of five additional sections to include a summary of the research findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications considering the relevant literature and theory, an implications section that is both methodological and practical, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

One central research question and three additional sub-questions focused this multiple case study. The first central research question was chosen to offer a broad overview of the traditional mentorship program in which the 13 alternatively certified teachers participated. How did participation in a traditional teacher mentorship program in a suburban school district in the southeastern part of the state of Virginia impact alternatively certified teachers' success? Answers to this question highlight the overall impact the traditional mentorship program had on the participants and how that impacted their success. Three themes of teacher/student interactions, teaching and learning styles, and personalities, relationships, and experiences emerged in response to this question. In answer to this central question, each participant felt at least some of the positive impacts of the traditional mentorship program, even though they were



alternatively certified teachers who had not graduated from a traditional college or university teacher preparation program. They still exhibited aspects of successful teachers such as good classroom behavior management and student rapport. All for whom student data was provided exhibited positive student achievement and were able to provide differentiated and hands-on instruction (TCPS, 2018b). Many of them were pros at collaboration and utilizing their prior experience with children to their advantage. Therefore, overall these alternatively certified teachers did believe the traditional mentorship program had positive impacts on their success as teachers.

The first and second sub-questions allowed the researcher to explore the positive and negative sides of combining traditionally and alternatively certified teachers during the mentorship process. How did the participants describe the benefits of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program? And how did the participants describe the challenges of participating in a traditional teacher mentorship program? The latter question, regarding the challenges that alternatively certified teachers experienced because their mentorship program was not created with their unique needs in mind, was answered regarding the lack of specific components present in traditional teacher preparation college or university programs. Theme four regarding gains and losses led to the answer to these questions. The topic of multiple mentor helpfulness offered positive feedback from some teachers who appreciated the various levels of mentorship because each mentor offered different types of assistance. Some however were disappointed in various mentors as they either did not have access to them long enough, or they were not available for meaningful conversation on a regular basis. The new teacher trainings usefulness results were more skewed. Most of the participants felt there were too many during the first school year, taking them away from their classroom. Many believed the ones led

by the outside speaker were not helpful but rather a waste of time. Others believed that the trainings needed to be held prior to the beginning of the school year, perhaps in the summer. Several felt there needed to be more purposeful professional development trainings focused on the topics which they as alternatively certified teachers had not experienced through a traditional teacher preparation program, such as classroom behavior management, curriculum delivery, and others. On a more positive note, the special education teachers all raved about the large binder that was given to them as a new hire, containing helpful information they have all used over time. One of the biggest suggestions to fill the gap of a missing component was the use of job shadowing, where teachers could visit other classrooms and observe veteran teachers. This would allow them to see seasoned teachers in action and they could take away ideas, tips, strategies, and other useful information. They mentioned observing either teachers within their own schools or possibly at other schools, depending on the flexibility in scheduling such events.

The third sub-question allowed the information collected from participants to highlight any possible impact of the traditional mentorship program on alternatively certified teachers. How did participation in a traditional mentorship program impact the participants' beliefs and assumptions of their classroom experiences? Theme five highlighted changes over time where teachers answered this question. Each participant said they felt overwhelmed to some degree on their first day but felt like things were more manageable by the end of the initial school year. They also noticed a change from being doubtful on some level to being more confident over time. Those who mentioned having content area fears early on, all felt more comfortable with the general education component after that first year. In addition, those with lesson creation or organization anxiety at the start of their careers acknowledged a change over time where they were able to feel more confident in both areas.

## Discussion

Each of the five themes discovered in this research were consistent throughout the entire process. Participants consistently discussed and demonstrated the multiple codes that evolved into the overarching themes of the study: teacher/student interactions, teaching and learning styles, personalities, relationships, and experiences, gains and losses, and changes over time. All findings were deeply rooted in both the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### Research Study Findings in Relationship to the Empirical Literature Reviewed

Multiple forms of empirically supported literature were discovered and reviewed prior to the commencement of this research, the first of which explained the various facets of the multiple routes to teacher licensure in the state of Virginia. It is generally known that a teacher who attends college and completes a teacher preparation program will graduate with a teaching license. What is not generally known is what an alternatively certified teacher is and how earning this type of licensure is accomplished. The USDOE (2018) defines the alternatively certified teacher as someone who enters the profession through some other method than graduating from a traditional teacher preparation program.

Barclay et al. (2011) noted that adults in midlife often desire a new profession that will be more fulfilling to them, as well as one that will contribute to the human race in a meaningful way. This surfaced during the research through theme three of personalities, relationships, and experiences. Participants noted on several occasions during the interviews how their real-life experiences, particularly those with children, had focused their desire to go into teaching. Bonnie knew her experiences with children through her prior career in social work had prepared her to assist students with special needs. The desire to better the world through social work and

teaching makes Bonnie the teacher she is today and she is extremely proud of that. Fran had also made a career change mid-life where she knew going from the corporate world to teaching was a higher calling for her. Being around children offers her that feeling of fulfillment she simply was not experiencing in her prior career. Making a difference in someone's life and actually being able to see that difference at work gave her a newly revived purpose in life.

Once career changes, mentioned above, take place, it is up to the individual to make of the situation whatever is desired. Eren (2012) espoused that any future, new-found satisfaction will be based on the level of professional engagement teachers meet, alongside their own inner aspirations. Theme four of gains and losses stemmed from participants discussing topics such as purposeful professional development. While some of them stated there was a need for more purposeful professional development for new hire alternatively certified teachers, Sally and William appreciated the topics covered during the new teacher trainings throughout their first year. Regardless of how it is accomplished, striving to be lifelong learners will keep them up-to-date in the profession, as well as invested in it, which will serve students well. Salm and Mulholland (2015) stated there was a need to build a level of adaptive and alternative mentorship strategies for alternatively certified teachers, therefore supporting the participants' feelings towards the impact of a traditional mentorship program on their success in the classroom. While the participants felt portions of the traditional mentorship program were suited to their needs, they also noted other strategies that would have been more helpful to them as alternatively certified new hires.

No matter how a teacher enters the profession or how they engage in the processes of teaching, each new hire is introduced to the uniqueness of a professional experience that is like no other (Gifford et al., 2013). Theme two of teaching and learning styles emerged from the

thoughts of participants on how they ensure their classrooms operate efficiently and benefit the students. Positive student achievement is always in the back of their minds when creating differentiated lesson plans which include hands-on instruction, making sure they are setting appropriate and measurable goals, guiding students to find their own answers, and making everyday connections to the learning material. Many professions operate with a specific goal in mind, such as in teaching. However, very few professions impact the lives of human beings in such a way that touches so many aspects of their daily operations as does teaching. Teaching truly is unique and these participants understand that, striving each day to make sure their students stay involved and engaged. During her interview, Belinda talked about how she enjoyed co-teaching most of all, because she was able to make connections with other teachers that benefited the students. Gina enjoys watching the look on the faces of her special needs students when they realize they have mastered a topic or understood a concept that had before alluded them.

In addition to explaining what alternative teacher licensure is, the extensive literature review completed prior to this research also explored the use of traditional mentorship programs and how they are typically set up. Although new teacher mentorship programs are mandated by the individual states, in Virginia, it is up to each school district to create their own (Bullough, 2012). These programs serve as bridges from pre-service to in-service teaching, and allow new teachers the opportunity to acclimate themselves to the profession (Hellsten et al., 2009; Zembytska, 2016). School systems frequently search for ways to evaluate and improve their programs for new hires, which ultimately was one of the reasons for the creation of this research topic (Childre, 2014).

The new teacher mentorship program utilized in the Timberlake County School System is designed to assist both new teachers to the profession, as well as those who are possible veterans, but new to their school district (TCPS, 2018a). Their program begins with a four-tiered approach to mentorship for new teachers, utilizing a retired teacher as a mentor, a building level mentor teacher (typically who teaches the same subject matter), a central administration office mentor (at times a coordinator in the same subject matter), and if needed, a coaching mentor if the teacher is struggling in a particular area (TCPS, 2018d). In addition to the various layers of mentorship available to the new hires, TCPS also requires the teachers' attendance at specific professional development meetings where there is a keynote speaker at three of them, along with a general new teacher meeting for information discussion (TCPS, 2018d).

The research conducted during this study both confirmed and corroborated what research was available regarding the typical mentorship support structures, as well as a theme that was discovered during the initial literature review of positive and negative experiences of mentorship programs. Ambrosetti (2014) espoused the importance of prepared mentors as an integral part of the mentorship process, which proved significant during this study as well. Each participant felt some type of support from at least one of their assigned mentors, or the natural ones that emerged through collegial relationships with veteran teachers. Several special education participants in this study discussed stressful situations surrounding their content area confidence as they co-taught with other general education teachers in the classroom. This corroborates Childre's (2014) study where Georgia teachers continued to have questions regarding their highly qualified content status even after experiencing a complex preparation program. Several participants experienced issues working in co-taught situations with other teachers or with instructional assistants. Gifford et al. (2013) reported that many second career teachers are not

prepared to work with co-teachers at the beginning of their mentorship program and first year of teaching, due to their lack of pre-preparation. The use of mentors at varying levels assisted in alleviating many of these fears held by the new hire teachers. The fourth theme discovered during this research, which was gains and losses, supports the use of the multiple mentor strategy. Discovered through the interview process, many participants felt as though they were able to gain support through at least one or more of the assigned mentors, as well as through naturally occurring mentor relationships that formed over time. Through the literature review process, it was discovered that Hellsten et al. (2009) supported the use of naturally occurring mentors as a valuable survival tool during a new teacher's first year.

The initial literature review also discussed the use of mentors while ensuring engagement versus disengagement as the key to a successful pairing (Hellsten et al., 2009). While a traditional new teacher program can offer multiple layers of direct personal mentorship assistance, for these relationships to be beneficial, there must be a significant level of engagement on the part of both the new teacher and the mentor (Fowler, 2012). Both parties must be willing to communicate on a regularly scheduled basis to reap the benefits of the pairing (Hellsten et al., 2009). The comments of the participants during the interview process built the concept of theme four, gains and losses, which highlighted both positive and negative comments regarding mentors. Some participants felt as though they had sufficient and meaningful interactions with their mentors, while others discussed the lack of consistency over time. Both Lynette and Monica experienced wonderful results with two of their mentors. Lynette said her retiree mentor had been a science teacher, which was very helpful in understanding her specific needs, as not all of the retired mentors share a common content area with their mentees. She said they utilized emails, texts, calls, and other forms of communication to ensure positive

engagement on a regular basis. Monica, too, had a wonderful experience with her mentor, who was another vision teacher for the district. Their consistent and meaningful communication helped shape Monica's performance over time, and allowed her to engage on a level that was far from superficial or forced.

Unfortunately, on the losses side of theme four, for some participants, their mentor relationships were not engaging and meaningful. Gina noted during her interview that her retired mentor only came to visit two times prior to Christmas, leaving a note the second time because she missed her. Then her mentor never returned or maintained any communication with her after that. This was stressful for Gina, as she felt she could have garnered useful information from the retiree, had she been able to communicate on a more consistent and meaningful basis. Wade also experienced a similar result with his retired mentor. His mentor sat in on a few of Wade's classes and offered suggestions until around February of the first year, then never returned or made any contact. Unfortunately, not all new teachers feel comfortable reaching out for help, as this might have spurred further interaction.

There were many articles available that discussed traditional mentorship programs and strategies, but none specifically referring to the experiences of alternatively certified teachers who traversed such events. This study extended the previous research discovered during the literature review. Most of the prior located information focused either on traditionally prepared teachers or on second career alternatively certified ones and the mentorship programs through which they participated. However, none truly focused on the impact of the traditionally designed mentorship programs on alternative educators. Huling et al. (2012) wrote about supporting and retaining novice teachers, suggesting cohort groups for the first five years of their careers, like a suggestion offered by one participant in this research. Supporting teachers and their specific



needs based on their induction route was discussed in Kearney's (2016) article where it was surmised that just because a school district offers a mentorship program, that does not mean it is the right one.

The initial literature review also noted that a well-designed new hire mentorship program can work as a catalyst for improvement, as long as the professional development offered to the teachers is based on their needs, and not simply on general requirements to be checked off or on law and policy needs (Burkman, 2012). Several participants in this study offered suggestions to improve their alternative participation in programs like these, such as the opportunity to have purposeful professional development training in areas such as classroom behavior management, curriculum delivery, and other topics. Because these are types of courses that alternatively certified teachers had not yet taken in a college or university preparation program setting, having these opportunities, perhaps even during the summer before their first year, would be of great benefit to them. Theme four of gains and losses indicated that participants desired more purposeful professional development targeted at the missing components of an alternatively certified teacher, such as that of classroom management, curriculum development, and general lesson planning and delivery methods. Patrick and Sally discussed the need for up front alternatively certified teacher trainings, possibly in the summer or at least at the very beginning of the school year. These professional development opportunities would focus on their specific needs that other traditionally certified teachers may not require, since they took courses targeted at areas such as classroom behavior management.

Continuing along the lines of theme four's gains and losses, theme five of changes over time encompassed multiple pieces of information gleaned from the initial literature review. Mitchell et al. (2013) noted that positive change can come from a well-designed new teacher

mentorship program through feelings of self-confidence. As noted by many of the participants during their interview processes, there were feelings of doubt and of being overwhelmed at the start of their first year. They knew they were lacking some of the supports that traditionally certified new hire counterparts had gained during their teacher preparation program participation, therefore they feared the unknown at first. Both Lynette and Gina referenced their first days in tears because of the sheer overwhelming thoughts regarding their new jobs. They doubted themselves and whether they could make it all come together in the classroom and help their students succeed, as well as succeed themselves in their new career choice.

Theme four of gains and losses tied in the use of new teacher resource guides and opportunities for job shadowing as ways to alleviate some of the fears and doubtful feelings in theme five of changes over time. The special education teacher participants all praised the notebooks that were created and given to them by the central administration office special education staff. Many of the regular education teacher participants who knew about these notebooks noted that something of that nature would have been helpful for them as well. Lynette discussed the idea of a checklist of sorts, so she would have known if she was on the right track and getting things done that needed to be completed. During the literature review, Goldrick et al.'s (2010) article highlighted evidence supporting a virtual race to the top style of competition between states that offers consistent improvement measurers and non-complacency. These types of resources are ideal for ensuring that teachers are on the right track and performing in a manner that supports this idea. With the right tools, they are able to get in the classroom and feel confident in what they are doing and how they are preparing their youth for the future.

Job shadowing would have also allowed more comfort to the new alternatively certified teachers, as many of the participants noted during their interviews. While Wade was lucky in

that he was able to informally shadow the prior Criminal Justice teacher while he worked as a police officer before teaching, not all of the new hires interviewed had that type of opportunity. Bonnie and Fran both noted that being able to shadow veteran teachers from other schools would have been very helpful. Seeing others in action and being able to learn new styles, techniques, and classroom activities would have allowed them to see what should be happening, so they could gauge where they stood in the overall daily activities of managing and teaching students. Learning from other teachers, such as the concept of mentorship in general, allows teachers to build meaningful relationships that far transcend past the simple conversations they have with one another (Bowser et al., 2014). Teaching is an overwhelming task for many in the profession, as they are expected to educate the world's youth, but with guidance from others, growth and power can emerge as the end result (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014; Malanson et al., 2014).

This study adds a novel contribution to the field of education in that it allows school districts to examine their mentorship programs to determine if they offer the special supports that an alternatively certified teacher typically needs. Kemmis et al. (2014) stated “mentoring is essentially about the mediation of professional learning” (p. 154). All teachers can profit from a well-designed mentorship program which will support their efforts to perform this type of mediation, but many alternatively certified teachers are at a bit of a disadvantage coming in without prior student teaching experience or courses that are targeted to teach someone how to teach. This makes the entire mentorship program a work in progress for school districts, which should always be examined to ensure its appropriate match to the incoming alternatively certified teachers. Alternatively certified teachers who participated in this study offered varying levels of positive gains and negative losses which connected well to the initial literature review prior to the research.

Collaboration and meaningful engagement with colleagues were two topics of conversation with participants during their interviews which lead to the emergence of theme three, personalities, relationships, and experiences. During the initial literature review, O'Connor et al. (2011) cited the importance of collaboration between mentors and mentees, which must be particularly targeted towards the special needs of alternatively certified teachers. Belinda, Fran, Lilly, and Morris each discussed the need for positive communication that would engage colleagues to collaborate and co-teach as a cohesive team of professionals. Belinda and Morris believe that working with a regular education teacher, who is helpful and responsive, has benefited both of them throughout their first years in the classroom. They have both learned an inordinate amount of information from their co-teachers and continue to be lifelong learners each day. Fran noted how important talking with other colleagues helped her know she was doing the job correctly and allowed her to interact with other educators who experience the same frustrations and successes daily. Lilly knows the benefit of being able to work alongside multiple other adults in the classroom, now that she has been able to forge relationships over time with her instructional assistants and can manage them at the same time. Ambrosetti (2014) had already defined the blending of teachers from all areas across the educational spectrum as a benefit to all involved, particularly the students. Many of the conversations had with the participants in this study support this information, as previously referenced.

Because one-on-one mentorship between two people is such an important and highly regarded anchor in new teacher mentorship programs, it is necessary to ensure the proper training of those who wish to participate with the new hires. Timberlake utilizes a pre-requisite training class through a local university to prepare their mentors for their experiences with pre-service teachers (TCPS, 2018c). Kuzle and Biehler (2015) believe there needs to be targeted

professional development for mentor teachers, and Timberlake's approach goes a long way in meeting this goal. Special attention to the details of a mentor/mentee pairing is very important in the new hire process, and is a task that should not be taken lightly (Ambrosetti, 2014). An extended amount of experience of a mentor teacher often leads to benefits for a new hire, therefore it is important for districts to pair accordingly (Pogodzinski, 2015). It is important however, to ensure that a veteran teacher is not chosen to mentor if that person is already overwhelmed with tasks, as this can lead to problems of time management and not allow for meaningful conversation with their mentee (Goering, 2013). Participants mentioned at times during their interviews that while the person they had been paired with at the building level was nice and helpful, they were not available very often due to other time constraints. Patrick mentioned that his retired mentor met with him and held small five to ten minute follow-up sessions, but with all the other new teachers assigned to him, there was not enough time spent to make it a truly successful pairing. William's building level mentor had no common planning time with him, so it was very difficult to talk and share information that might have been helpful.

During the initial literature review, articles were discovered that discussed options for filling the gaps between the needs of traditionally certified teachers and alternatively certified ones. Kidd et al. (2015) discussed the importance of the varied professional development needs of alternatively certified teachers, where they can gain information on topics such as classroom behavior management, curriculum design and delivery, and others. Participants noted this need through theme four of gains and losses where they believed they could have significantly benefited from such types of training. Perhaps the inclusion of training specifically targeted to alternatively certified teachers might also extend the knowledge of aspiring mentors to avoid the aforementioned issues. Educating potential mentors on the missing elements from a traditional

teacher preparation program might give them the knowledge they need to be able to work with alternatively certified teachers in certain targeted areas where they may feel weak (Liu et al., 2015). Understanding the need for more targeted assistance may have supplemented the participants who felt underserved by their mentors, either because they ended the relationship too soon or because they did not fully understand their needs. Administrative follow-up on how an alternatively certified teacher is responding to the traditional mentorship program would also be beneficial, as they could examine both the nature and purpose of the program specifically regarding their needs (Kearney, 2016). Periodic scheduled conversations between administrators, mentors and mentees might have assisted with some of the breakdowns in the mentorship program several participants experienced.

O'Connor et al. (2011) discussed an option called the Teaching Fellows Program. While this two-year pre-training model, that then allows teachers to become alternatively certified, is not feasible in the fast paced world of teacher assignment, it did insight an idea during the literature review period. Alternatively certified teachers might benefit from a summertime training opportunity where they are offered professional development and mentoring regarding the areas where they lack information, such as classroom behavior management and others. Multiple participants mentioned the idea of summer information sessions during their interviews, therefore opening the topic for conversation when someone is hired. Obviously time and financial aspects would impact this option, leaving it on the table for some districts. However, there may be ways to utilize twelve month employees as mentors and offer the summertime trainings as options for alternatively certified teachers instead of making them mandatory. Any supplemental option that will benefit alternatively certified teachers will certainly be appreciated, based on the comments of the participants in this study.

Whether taking into account the actual mentors, the professional development trainings, or the additional resources available through a mentorship program, the ultimate goal of a new teacher mentorship program is to assist, monitor, and retain good teachers (Kidd et al., 2015). Job satisfaction and fulfillment are both tied to a teacher's self-worth of their abilities in the classroom, making these preparation programs even more important than one might surmise (Malanson et al., 2014). Both traditionally and alternatively certified teachers can and typically do learn a great deal from mentorship programs, regardless of whether they are tailored to anyone's specific needs (Conway, 2015). The purpose of this study was to research the impact of the traditionally designed programs on the alternatively certified teachers. Based on the various data collection methods of interviews, field notes/classroom observations, and document analysis/archival records, participants felt their experiences were mixed while participating as an alternatively certified teacher in a traditionally designed mentorship program. They felt as though they received a helpful amount of support in general from the program, but could also have benefited from additional specific supports based on their needs. Zembytska (2016) notes that any type of mentorship program is a key strategy during teacher induction in determining both effectiveness and retention of teachers. These participants all enjoy what they do and overall do not feel as though they have been cheated out of anything major that they were not able to overcome.

### **Research Study Findings in Relationship to the Theoretical Literature Reviewed**

Adult learning theory and one of its specific branches, transformative learning theory, guided this research. Adult learning theory states that adults are both self-directed and plan to take responsibility for their own decisions (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001), and that adults can and want to work independently of assistance from others.

Experiential moments allow adults to use their circumstances and surroundings to construct their own learning (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). Transformative learning theory explains personal transformations that occur as people begin new experiences (Mezirow, 1997). They change ideas and meanings to new perspectives over time (Brigham, 2011; Christie et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1995), and challenge the intellectual schema to bring about change. By examining their ingrained beliefs with new experiences, over time, a naturalistic change takes place for learners such as teachers (Poutiatine & Conners, 2012).

The results from this research extend both theories. The definition of adult learning theory is supported throughout this study with most teachers experiencing positive outcomes from their traditional mentorship participation. Although there appeared to be areas of improvement needed for this program, overall the participants were able to fill in the gaps of their missing information and still turn out as successful classroom teachers. For example, many of them utilized other colleagues to gain valuable advice and tips for making their experiences as rich as possible, for both them and their students. They did not sit around and commiserate about missing components, but rather sought out those who could assist them. Experiences of trial and error, to see what worked and what did not, allowed participants to figure things out on their own.

As for the extension of the transformative learning theory, these teachers were able to experience personal transformations as they began their new careers. They changed their own personal perspectives of how they felt on day one to how they felt at the end of their first year based on the positive outcomes of the traditional mentorship program and their experiences within it. They challenged their own ideas and beliefs that may have hindered them in the



beginning, by setting aside their fears and frustrations to work towards a common goal of feeling empowered and ready to make whatever changes necessary to succeed.

Teachers are the cornerstone of education, lending themselves to a profession that expects both nurturing and guidance of their students to be the best they can possibly be. Although the alternatively certified teacher participants in this study felt they could have benefited from some additional resources through the traditional mentorship program, they utilized their interpersonal skills to become successfully functioning members of their school's team. This process was supported by prior research regarding the two theories that were used to focus this study: adult learning theory, and more specifically, the transformative learning theory. As adult learners, these participants were self-directed and took responsibility for their own decisions and actions (Green & Ballard, 2011; Knowles, 1970; Merriam, 2001). They used their own personal experiences to transform themselves by seeking out what they needed when it was not readily available to them (Mezirow, 1997). At no point did any of these participants simply sit around and wait for others to assist them. They instead chose to make the best of the situations in which they found themselves, and forged ahead to become the teachers they are today, inspiring students to achieve their goals.

### **Implications**

There were three branches of implications that stemmed from this study: theoretical, empirical, and practical. The theoretical implications focus on the two theories that guided this research: adult learning theory and transformative learning theory. Empirical implications are acknowledged by the alternatively certified participants' comments and results regarding their need for additional support during the new hire induction period. Finally, practical implications

are discussed that offer suggestions for the Timberlake County Public School System to assist their new hires who enter the profession by way of an alternative route to licensure.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Theoretical implications of this study relate to the adult learning and transformative learning theories that guided the research. Participants in this study have all proven that although they could have benefited from additional supports for the missing knowledge and experiences they had, due to being an alternatively certified candidate, they also were able to persevere and be successful on their own accord. Each teacher studied was able to utilize their desire to do well and their experiences they encountered to tailor their styles and beliefs over time. None of these teachers took their decision to become an educator lightly. They knew based on either their past experiences or careers that their hearts led them to the classroom and that they wanted to be the best they could be. Having a heart for teaching allowed them to harness that drive and determination, whether they had the proper supports to do so or not. Trial and error over time, with day-to-day experiences in the classroom, allowed them to transform their ideas on subjects such as classroom behavior management and curriculum delivery into what worked for them and their students.

### **Empirical Implications**

Empirically speaking, this study corroborates previous research that acknowledges the fact that alternatively certified teachers are often at a disadvantage when they enter the classroom on that first day. These teachers are left to their own devices to fill in the gaps, in conjunction with their mentorship program designed with traditionally certified teachers in mind. Based on some of the suggestions of the alternatively certified participants, research such as that completed by Martin et al. (2016) supports additions such as opportunities to observe other

veteran teachers as a resource for modeling purposes. O'Toole and Essex (2012) acknowledge the art of teaching as a common pedagogy of successful teachers and that making sure alternatively certified teachers understand the challenging curriculum issues that can arise, without having taken these types of courses in college, is of the utmost importance. As teachers take on their own professional identities over time, Schultz and Ravitch (2013) insist there are different but similar results to both traditionally and alternatively certified teacher results when all is said and done. So many teachers can persevere and conquer difficulties that come their way because of their mentorship programs, but also their innate desires and abilities to succeed.

### **Practical Implications**

Practical implications of this study affect the many stakeholders of both Timberlake County Schools and multiple other school districts. Timberlake's turnover rate for teachers could be impacted by this type of research, as they examine ways to tailor their traditional mentorship program to more fully support alternatively certified teachers (TCPS, 2018c). It may not be necessary to create an entirely separate program for these teachers, but rather to include additional supports for them. As Kidd et al. (2015) espoused, a long-term goal of additional supports leads to greater satisfaction with the job, which in turn translates into longer tenure for these individuals. Many stakeholders benefit when teachers remain in the profession over time, such as the educators themselves, the students and parents, the administrators, and society. Teachers can hone their skills through the years and move from novice to well-seasoned veteran ones who are able to impact success with higher student achievement. They will feel more satisfied and remain in their profession for extended periods of time, ultimately till retirement. Students are the direct recipients of successful teachers, as they receive daily instruction and support in their classrooms. Their achievement levels are enhanced by such teachers and they

are more likely to grow into successful adults who contribute in meaningful ways to society. Parents benefit from successful teachers because they can go to work daily, knowing their children are being well cared for by professionals who can instill both academia and social skills, producing a well-rounded graduate after their senior year. Administrators benefit because they can trust in their decisions to hire alternatively certified teachers, who will become some of their star employees as they progress through their career.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of this study included the choice of a multiple case study as opposed to a phenomenological one. As the purpose was to uncover the impact of a traditional mentorship program on the alternatively certified teachers who participated in it, this was the better choice (Stake, 1995). Another delimitation of this study included the purposeful decision to define the participants as those who had worked less than three years in this school system, those who were new to the profession when they were hired in this school system, those who participated in the same traditional teacher mentorship program, and those who entered the profession through alternative routes to certification. This allowed the researcher to determine the impact of the program in which they participated collectively (Creswell, 2013). Both delimitations helped define both the scope and focus of the study.

Limitations of this study included two of the data collection methods of teacher evaluations and student achievement data. Not all participants were willing to provide their teacher evaluation copies, which could not be controlled by the researcher. Some of the missing evaluations may have led to other data which could have offered additional positive or negative data regarding the impact of the traditional mentorship program participation. The lack of all teacher evaluation copies could have been credited to the unwillingness to share them, but could

have also been due to the lack of time or not remembering to pull the evaluation and send it to the researcher. Another limitation was the lack of student achievement data from the school district, again, out of the control of the researcher. This was due to several factors, including the incorporation of six special education teachers for whom test score data is not tracked, but rather is tracked through the regular education teachers. For many subject areas, there were no trackable assessments, such as preschool and the visually impaired. Certain grade levels and subject areas do not administer a Standards of Learning test which would have offered data, such as second grade and seventh grade social studies. The only true data available was that for algebra one and two and for biology. Even for those second-year teachers, no data comparisons over time were available due to their short tenure.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research offered insight into only a small population of teachers in an isolated area of the country. Future recommendations for research would encourage the use of other multiple case studies that would span over multiple geographical locations throughout the United States, to include multiple states and types of school districts. For example, results could prove very different in a rural area as opposed to the suburban district chosen for this study. Continuing to bound the cases, as done in this study, would be necessary to ensure a population of alternatively certified teachers who can remember their mentorship program experience. The use of same subject participants would continue to be necessary to ensure coverage of all types of teachers and their experiences. More emphasis could also be placed on the differences in the responses from populations as useful future research, such as between special education teachers versus regular education ones.

## Summary

Chapter Five offered overall conclusions to this research study, and included a brief overview, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two, implications of the research broken down into theoretical, empirical, and practical types, delimitations and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research possibilities. This study implies two key components to the use of a traditional mentorship program to induct new hire alternatively certified teachers. The first is that overall, the traditional program in this school district study is working. Teachers can utilize the multi-level support system included in the program of multiple mentors and the new teacher orientation. However, there are some missing components that would assist the new teachers in becoming more successful in the classroom from the very beginning. Participants noticed the need for more focused new hire trainings, possibly early in the summer prior to their start date, where they could learn about some of the missing components from their backgrounds such as classroom behavior management and curriculum delivery. With any program, there will always be room for improvement and supplemental resources. Perhaps this research study can assist in helping the Timberlake County School District, and any others who hire alternatively certified teachers, in filling the gap for these educators. All stakeholders involved from teachers to students, to administrators, to society, benefit when educators are successful and are in it for the long haul.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Email Invitation for Teachers

Hello, my name is Kim Thompson, and I am a Liberty University Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education. I have been approved through Dr. Susan Stone (pseudonym), the Director of Elementary Instruction for Timberlake County Public Schools (pseudonym) to conduct research regarding my doctoral dissertation. I am searching for participants who are teachers who entered the profession through an alternative route to teacher licensure, and your name was given to me as a potential candidate. Participation may yield a benefit to education in general, specifically in regards to the support of new teachers who are alternatively certified. Teachers who enter the profession through this manner are integrated with traditionally certified teachers during the new hire mentorship induction phase of their careers. If alternatively certified teachers need additional supports above and beyond those of their traditionally certified counterparts, this research may highlight such needs. Please see the attached consent form which will outline how the research process would work, should you choose to participate. Being a former teacher, I completely understand the time constraints under which a teacher works. Therefore, I respectfully ask that you read the information and decide if you are interested or not. I would appreciate a return email with any questions you may have, as well as your decision as to whether or not you are willing to participate by *insert date here*. The entire process on your part will only take approximately two to two and a half hours, and can take place wherever and whenever is most convenient for you. You will also be compensated for your time with a \$50 gift card to the vendor of your choice.

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM

“Participation in a Traditional Mentorship Program:  
A Multiple Case Study of Alternatively Certified Teachers”

Kim Thompson  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of alternatively certified teachers who have completed a new teacher mentorship program. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher who earned certification/licensure through an alternative route. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kim Thompson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of a traditional mentorship program (which was designed for both alternatively and traditionally certified teachers) on alternatively certified teachers.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Meet with the researcher for an approximate one to one and a half hour interview. Notes will be taken and the interview will be audio recorded for researcher review at a later time. All information shall remain confidential throughout the entire process, and will later be destroyed.
2. Allow the researcher to observe you in the classroom while students are present. Notes will be taken for review at a later time. A follow-up phone call will be made between you and the researcher to discuss any clarifications, explanations, etc. you would like to note.
3. Release any previous performance appraisals during your tenure in this school system, any student test data progression data, and your hire date.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include possible assistance to education in general, specifically in regards to the support of new teachers who are alternatively certified. Teachers who enter the profession through this manner are integrated with traditionally certified teachers during the new hire mentorship induction phase of their careers. If alternatively certified teachers need additional

supports above and beyond those of their traditionally certified counterparts, this research may highlight such needs.

**Compensation:** Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a gift card of their choosing in the amount of \$50. The gift card will be presented to the participant upon successful completion of participation. Participants will receive this compensation regardless of whether or not they decide to complete all activities or provide the entirety of the researcher's requested information.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- All information collected from participants will remain confidential throughout the entire process. At no time will anyone other than the researcher or the professional transcriptionist have access to the data. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement as well.
- Paper data will be stored in locked storage areas, while any electronic data will be stored in a password protected environment. At the end of the research, all identifiable data will be destroyed either by shredding of paper documents or by deletion of electronic media.
- Verbal recordings of the interviews will only be made available to the researcher and the paid professional transcriptionist, who will sign a confidentiality agreement. These recordings will be held in a locked storage area until they are downloaded into a password protected private computer. These recordings, and then the written transcriptions, will assist the researcher in reviewing the interview material discussed. Once the research is concluded, all recordings and transcriptions will be permanently erased.
- There are no limits of confidentiality for these teacher participants. All information shared with the researcher will remain completely confidential.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Kim Thompson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [540-206-7761](tel:540-206-7761)/[kdthompson@liberty.edu](mailto:kdthompson@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's dissertation committee chair, Dr. Tracey Pritchard, at [tbprichard@liberty.edu](mailto:tbprichard@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Signature of Investigator

Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions for Teachers

#### Standardized Open-Ended Teacher Interview Questions

##### *Pre-Participation in a Traditional Mentorship Program*

1. Please tell me about yourself (i.e. things you like to do, your family, where and what you teach, etc.).
2. Tell me why you decided to become a (*insert content area of interviewee*) teacher through an alternative route and how you decided on the subject you teach?
3. Please tell me about the process of how you became an alternatively certified teacher (i.e. the type of alternative route to licensure you took, etc.).
4. Please describe your first day in the classroom with students.
5. How confident did you feel in your abilities to be a successful teacher on that first day?

##### *During Participation in a Traditional Mentorship Program*

6. Please tell me about your mentor/mentee relationship during your new hire mentorship induction program at both the district level and the school level.
7. Please tell me about the specific components of your mentorship program that you experienced that first year (i.e. new hire meetings in and out of the school building, the availability and quality of advice and direction given, etc.).
8. What specific supports were available to you in the traditional mentorship program?
9. What specific supports were missing in the traditional mentorship program?

##### *Post-Participation in a Traditional Mentorship Program*

10. Based on how the mentorship program fostered your knowledge of teaching, please



- describe what you perceive as your strengths after completion of the traditional mentorship program.
11. Please also describe what you perceive as your challenges or areas of continued growth that were or are still needed after completion of the traditional mentorship program.
  12. In an effort to provide the school district with useful and practical feedback, what do you believe needs to be enhanced or added to the traditional mentorship program for alternatively certified teachers like yourself?
  13. How confident do you feel in your abilities to be a successful teacher now that you have completed the mentorship program?

