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Teaching on the Prairie: First-Year Teachers in Rural Schools

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Mary Eldredge-Sandbo

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Teaching on the Prairie: First-Year Teachers in Rural Schools

by

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MA, North Dakota State University, 2000

BS, College of St. Benedict, 1981

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2018

Abstract

The North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS) mentoring program is available to 1st-year teachers employed in the state public schools. Because there has been limited research on the topic, the purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of how participation in the mentoring program affects the experiences and developing effectiveness of 1st-year teachers in rural schools, which is important because teacher retention and recruitment are a concern in rural schools. This study was set within a conceptual framework of andragogy and constructivism and guided by 2 research questions that inquired about the experiences of teaching in a rural school and working with an NDTSS mentor through the 1st year of teaching. This descriptive, embedded, single case study focused on 11 new teachers in rural schools who participated in the NDTSS program. Through constant comparison, 11 interviews, 6 sets of conference logs, and 5 performance rubrics were analyzed for the sample as well as NDTSS survey data completed by 154 new teachers. The results led to 11 themes that revealed each participant had unique experiences working with a mentor. Additionally, working with a mentor provided support to deal with challenges and develop teaching effectiveness, especially when there was a positive relationship between the mentor and new teacher. These findings guided the development of a professional development project for rural NDTSS participants, aimed at providing additional support to new teachers as they work with their mentors to develop their teaching identity and effectiveness. The results of this study contribute to positive social change by increasing the understanding, appreciation, and support of the experiences of 1st-year teachers, especially in rural schools, which holds the potential to strengthen teaching and learning in the state's rural schools.

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the many teachers in North Dakota who find beauty in their students, wonder in their surroundings, and ways to reach out and learn with others across our beautiful state.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful beyond words to my family who provided support in countless ways as I progressed through this doctoral journey. My husband's patience and belief that I would really finish this was a constant throughout the process. My father, who found the study "so darned interesting" and provided valuable editing did not see the finished product, but his belief, love of learning, and old, scruffy sweater were often the only things that kept me sitting at my computer. My mom knew just when to ask about my progress and when to ask about anything else, and my siblings, nieces, and nephews patiently understood when I was behind and unorganized.

I am thankful to my students and colleagues who teach me so much each day. I am in awe of the teachers who agreed to participate in my study. I greatly appreciate their honesty and willingness to share their precious time. I am also grateful to Laurie Stenehjem for her support, assistance, and dedication to new teachers in North Dakota.

Finally, I thank my chair, Dr. Mary Cramer. Her knowledge, understanding, persistence, and passion for teaching provided the guidance, inspiration, and motivation to work through the challenges and celebrate the success of this process. I am also grateful to my second committee member, Dr. Marilyn Robb, and URR, Dr. Kimberley Alkins. Early in my career, becoming a doctoral student seemed a dream beyond attainment; later in my career, earning my doctoral degree is a humbling and rewarding reminder of the value and excitement of learning every day.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Stories of teaching on the North Dakota prairie often elicit sepia-toned images of one-room schools where teachers taught all subjects to all students as well as stoked the fires, fed the children, and cleaned the building (Peterson, n.d.). While one-room schools are mostly a thing of the past, teaching in rural schools still holds unique challenges and rewards (Adams & Woods, 2015; Barley, 2009; Ferris & Ruff, 2011; Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Each fall many rural schools across the state open their doors to teachers who are beginning their careers. A rural setting in North Dakota often promises open spaces, beautiful scenery, and opportunities to become a part of a close-knit community. Some of those teachers will stay in the community for years to come, while others will seek employment elsewhere.

In some communities, school administrators struggle to recruit and retain teachers (Hall & Clappe, 2016). In recent years, newspapers across the state have reported the challenges that North Dakota schools face due to teacher shortages (Magee, 2015; Nicholson, 2016; North Dakota Department of Public Instruction [NDDPI], 2017b; Van Ells, 2012). The tasks of hiring qualified teachers and implementing practices that will support those teachers' professional growth are crucial and can be especially challenging in rural settings (Adams & Woods, 2015; Bland, Church, & Luo, 2014; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). As researchers continue to explain the complex topics of retention and recruitment, a focus on rural schools indicates that location, isolation, and other issues continue to challenge first-year teachers (Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010;

Rowland Woods, 2016). A policy report by the Education Commission of the States cited concerns that included “geographic and social isolation” (Aragon, 2016, p. 5) as reasons why teachers shy away from rural schools. Researchers have identified mentoring as one way to increase retention and improve the experiences of first-year teachers regardless of where they begin their career (Ingersoll, 2012; Monk, 2007; Rowland Woods, 2016).

While in this case study, I focused on the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers who participated in the state mentoring program, the findings also shed light on how to increase retention and develop teaching effectiveness in rural classrooms across North Dakota.

In this section, after I outline the local problem for this research project, I will explain the rationale for this study and describe why increasing the understanding of one group of teachers in this state is important. I will also introduce the research questions that guided this research. In the review of the literature, I will establish the conceptual framework and provide an overview of current research that relates to this study. Finally, I will present the implications for the professional development project that I developed at the conclusion of this study.

The Local Problem

In 2009, the North Dakota legislature established the NDTSS through a bill aimed at raising student achievement and teacher effectiveness (North Dakota House Bill 1400, 2009). The NDTSS office is located in Bismarck, North Dakota where one coordinator and a small staff coordinate the mentoring program and a coaching academy, which both serve public school teachers across the state (North Dakota Education Standards and

Practices Board [NDESPB], n.d.). According to the NDTSS coordinator in 2014, there was limited evidence to determine the extent to which participation in the North Dakota Teacher Support System (NDTSS) mentoring program improved the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural North Dakota schools (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, June 7, 2014). Table 1 shows that although the mentoring program has grown each year, not all administrators enrolled first-year teachers in the program.

Table 1

First-Year Teachers in North Dakota and Participation in NDTSS

	Full time first-year teachers in North Dakota	First-year teachers enrolled in the NDTSS	Percent enrollment in NDTSS
Spring, 2010	363	123	34%
2010-2011	337	123	36%
2011-2012	355	175	49%
2012-2013	446	276	61%
2013-2014	465	291	63%
2014-2015	470	352	75%

Note. NDTSS participation data retrieved from NDTSS enrollment records (NDTSS, 2017a). ND first-year teacher data retrieved from NDDPI (2014a, 2015, 2017a)

In 2013, the districts that participated in the mentoring program employed about 63% of the first-year teachers in the state (see Table 1). This percentage, however, was not consistent among all of the school districts across the state where first-year teachers were hired. A review of the 2013 enrollment data showed that the largest districts in the state enrolled in the mentoring program, which suggests that some of the teachers not enrolled in the NDTSS program were employed in rural settings (NDTSS, 2017a). An analysis of North Dakota's public-school district student enrollment numbers revealed

that 85% of the districts had fewer than 600 students (NDDPI, 2014b). Rural school settings present first-year teachers with unique challenges that include isolation, exclusion, and loneliness, which can all lead to turnover (Adams & Woods, 2015; Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Kono, 2011, 2012). The need to understand how mentoring can influence first-year teachers in rural schools is not unique to North Dakota, but an overview of changes in the state outlines the challenges that school administrators have faced in recent years as they strived to meet the needs of schools' growing student bodies.

In North Dakota, the need to hire teachers has been a pressing concern for administrators in many districts. An oil boom in the state led to increased employment opportunities and a growing population, and in 2012, North Dakota was the fastest growing state in the nation (Brown, 2013; Fershee, 2012; Smith, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Lately, as oil prices have declined, population numbers are still expected to increase (North Dakota Census Office, 2016; Springer, 2016). These changes have contributed to an increase in student enrollment in many districts and a shortage of teachers across the state (Fershee, 2012; United States Department of Education Office of Post Secondary Education, 2016). Within the growing towns, school administrators have struggled to provide the classroom space and appropriate resources while new students, with diverse learning needs, enter their districts (Fershee, 2012; Leinen, 2015; Suarez, 2012).

Results of studies from as close as Montana (Redburn & Ruff, 2011) and South Dakota (Kono, 2011, 2012) and as far as Australia (Richards, 2012) and Zimbabwe

(Manwa, Mukeredzi, & Manwa, 2016) echo the importance of meeting the unique needs of rural teachers who are new to the teaching profession. In 2012, evaluators from the New Teacher Center (NTC; 2012a) conducted surveys to measure perceptions of administrators, mentors, and first-year teachers who participated in the NDTSS. First-year teachers who completed the survey reported that involvement in the program led to improvements in their teaching practice (NTC, 2012a). However, there is a lack of understanding about the developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants, especially in rural schools (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, June 11, 2013). Furthermore, perception questions in evaluation surveys can at best provide limited insight into the day-to-day experiences of first-year teaching in rural schools (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, June 7, 2012; October 11, 2012; NTC, 2012a).

Although I focused on first-year teachers in North Dakota in this study, the topic has national and global relevance. In districts far and near, policymakers, administrators, and teacher leaders strive to retain first-year teachers and provide the supports that will improve their experiences and effectiveness in rural settings (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kono, 2011, 2012; Manwa et al., 2016; Miller & Hellsten, 2017). Through analysis of multiple sources of data, I sought evidence to increase understanding about whether participation in the NDTSS mentoring program improved the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural North Dakota schools.

Rationale

In this case study, I studied one group of teachers who participated in the statewide, voluntary NDTSS mentoring program. The purpose of the study was to

increase the understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers who participated in the mentoring program while teaching in a rural school. The rationale for increasing this understanding was to contribute to opportunities for effective teacher recruitment and retention, and ultimately, to provide insight that can lead to strengthening the experiences and effectiveness of teachers in rural classrooms across the state.

As student enrollment in North Dakota's schools grows and changes, the NDTSS coordinator, assistants, and mentors are prepared to support and guide teachers through their first year. Past participants, mentors, and administrators have indicated strong support of the NDTSS in year-end surveys (NTC, 2012a). While this support is vital, there is continued motivation to provide evidence of the program's effectiveness to policymakers because the state legislature funds the program on a biennial basis (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, November 11, 2013). This same evidence may also be helpful to administrators who are considering asking teachers, who already have many responsibilities, to invest time in this rigorous program as mentors or NDTSS participants. Further research focused on the experiences and developing effectiveness of rural teachers who participate in the NDTSS may encourage continued funding and increased enrollment in this program.

The combination of increased student enrollment and decreased teacher availability intensifies the rationale to understand how education programs are supporting North Dakota teachers and students. According to Strong, Ward, and Grant (2011), "the common denominator in school improvement and student success is the teacher" (p. 351).

The NDTSS mentor training manual stated, “Together we can provide what the students of North Dakota need so they can create the successful lives we all want for them” (NDESPB, 2014, p. 5). With increased understanding about the experiences and developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants in rural schools, additional information will be available to stakeholders that has the potential to strengthen the educational experience of students in rural classrooms across the state. Information from this study can guide the NDTSS program coordinator, trainers, and mentors regarding program development as well as school administrators and policymakers who continue to make decisions about the program (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, June 11, 2013; October 11, 2012).

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

After 6 years, enrollment in the NDTSS program has continued to increase (NDTSS, 2017a). Between 2010 and 2017, 145 of North Dakota’s 178 public school districts participated at least once in the NDTSS program (NDTSS, 2017a). During the 2014–2015 school year, about 50% of the North Dakota school districts participated in the NDTSS program (NDTSS, 2016). Not all schools in the state hire first-year teachers every year, but among the schools that did not participate in the mentoring program were more than 100 first-year teachers (see NDDPI, 2015; NDTSS, 2016). There has not been an in-depth investigation regarding the lack of participation by some schools (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, October 11, 2012). It is possible, however, that some administrators opted out because there was a lack of understanding about the NDTSS program, accompanied by the concern of adding extra work to the already full

load of the first-year teacher and potential mentors (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, October 11, 2012). Stakeholders, who include policymakers, school administrators, mentors, first-year teachers, the NDTSS coordinator and staff, and those involved with teacher preparation, stand to learn more about how participation in the mentoring program affects the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in the state.

As a part of the NDTSS program, all participants are invited to complete evaluation surveys. However, the monitoring of participants in the program is not the same in all districts. On the one hand, in some of the state's large districts, resources exist to monitor the progress and experiences of NDTSS participants (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, December 13, 2012). For example, one district collaborated with the NTC and NDTSS in a comprehensive induction program that included a program evaluation (Agre, 2013; NTC, 2012b). On the other hand, resources have not been available to focus on the unique experiences of first-year teachers in many of the rural districts across the state (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, December 13, 2012).

The results of this study have the potential to strengthen the understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of participants in the NDTSS program by explicitly including participants from rural districts. The associate director of the NTC's program and impact department expressed interest in the results of this study, and she stated, "understanding exactly whether and how teaching practice is improving, particularly in connection with the mentoring, would be a significant contribution to the field" (C. Ravi, personal communication, November 29, 2012). In summary, providing

stakeholders with insight and understanding about the experiences and teaching effectiveness of rural NDTSS participants framed the rationale for this study.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Just as the necessity of supporting rural teachers spans the globe, so does the gap in understanding of the effectiveness of mentoring programs and the experiences of the participants in those programs. Noting the increasing number of mentoring programs, Fletcher and Strong (2009) emphasized the need to learn about the types of programs that increase student achievement and teacher effectiveness. In this study, I addressed the topic of first-year teachers' developing effectiveness because researchers have linked teacher effectiveness to student learning.

While researchers have emphasized the connection between student success and teacher effectiveness for years, the literature also highlights some experiences of first-year teachers that can impede teaching quality (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Danielson, 2007; Gillham, Evans, & Williams, 2016; Jones, 2012; Kane & Francis, 2013). Jones (2012) described being “overwhelmed . . . busy . . . burdened . . . and worried” (p. 74) during his first year of teaching and claimed that, among other things, support, in the form of a well-planned mentorship program, would facilitate improved teacher effectiveness. Jones' distinction of “organized mentorship” (p. 4) serves as a reminder that there is a wide range of mentoring programs, and not all of them appear to support improved teaching (Kane & Francis, 2013; Kardos & Moore-Johnson, 2010). There is the potential and need for mentoring programs to not only ease the transition into teaching but to set the groundwork for professional learning aimed at improving

effectiveness. Kardos and Moore-Johnson (2010) stressed the need for continued research to help policymakers understand whether or not the mentoring programs “deliver what they promise, and if not, how they can be strengthened so first-year teachers can be better served” (p. 41). This charge supports the rationale of this study to increase understanding of participation in the NDTSS mentoring program.

A strong mentoring program has the potential to meet some of the challenges of first-year teachers. Kono (2012) noted that first-year teachers wanted to teach in schools that provided support, respect, and professionalism, but they were hesitant about seeking employment in small, rural schools located far from the conveniences of larger towns or cities. Effective mentoring programs can mitigate these concerns and facilitate the development of a school climate based on collegial support and professional learning (Moir, 2009). As state policymakers and the NDTSS coordinator and staff make decisions about the mentoring program, additional information can support their decisions and increase their understanding of how partaking in the program can affect first-year teachers. The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the experiences of one group of NDTSS participants and to share the findings with stakeholders who value the teaching and learning that take place in rural schools across North Dakota.

Definition of Terms

Developing effectiveness: The practices that develop during the teacher’s first year that are consistent with Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching effectiveness. Danielson’s framework describes teacher responsibilities that “have been documented

through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning” (p. 1).

First-year teachers: A “licensed teacher in the first year of contracted teaching” (NDTSS, 2014, para. 3). Eligible teachers include those employed by public prekindergarten through Grade 12 schools, special education units, Bureau of Indian Education schools, career and technical education centers, or regional education associations (NDTSS, 2014). Other terms that are used interchangeably with this term include new teachers, novice teachers, and beginning teachers.

Mentor: An individual who provides support to a first-year teacher and also observes, collects data, and provides feedback to help the first-year teacher “develop the habits of mind that will help them become effective practitioners” (Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2009, p. 34). In the NDTSS program, a mentor is typically a full-time teacher assigned to one first-year teacher for 1 school year and completes the NDTSS mentor training (NDTSS, 2017b).

Rural schools: Schools across North Dakota except for those located in the cities with populations exceeding 10,000 according to the 2010 U.S. Census (CensusViewer, 2011a).

Significance of the Study

The significance of studying the lack of understanding about the experiences and developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants in rural schools reaches from the state level to each student in rural classrooms across the state. An increase in understanding about the experiences and developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants can strengthen

North Dakota's educational structure on several different levels. At the level of NDTSS implementation, increased understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of participants can help the NDTSS coordinator and staff determine how to better support first-year teachers in rural schools as those teachers work to improve their practice. At the school district level, increased understanding may inform decisions about whether enrolling in the NDTSS merits asking teachers to commit the required time and energy. At the policy level, an increase in understanding may guide decisions about funding and sustaining the program. Most important, however, this study is significant because of the first-year teachers in rural areas of the state who may benefit from informed support and guidance as they strive to teach students who will shape the remainder of the 21st century.

Research Questions

To increase understanding about the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural schools who participate in the NDTSS mentoring program, I asked two research questions and one subquestion. I designed the first question within the broad context of teaching in rural schools and focused the second question on participation in the mentoring program and teaching experiences. In this way, I was able to investigate the shared and unique experiences of teaching in a rural setting, gain insight into the experiences of participating in the mentoring program, and finally, obtain evidence of teaching practices that pointed to developing teacher effectiveness. I answered the research questions by analyzing data from interviews, conference logs,

performance rubrics, and program surveys in a case study research design. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do first-year teachers describe their experiences of teaching in a rural school?
2. How do first-year teachers in rural schools describe their experiences in the mentoring program?

Subquestion: What can be understood about the developing effectiveness of teachers in rural schools who participate in the NDTSS mentoring program?

My preliminary review of the literature showed that teachers in rural schools likely share experiences such as feeling cut off from others and overwhelmed by their workload and that mentorship has the potential to alleviate some of the negative experiences and support improved teacher effectiveness (Jones, 2012; Kono, 2012; Moir, 2009). In addition, there is a need for further research focused on mentoring and its relationship to first-year teaching in rural schools and developing teacher effectiveness (Kardos & Moore-Johnson, 2010). The research questions guided my further research into the literature to gain insight and guidance into the research problem and subsequent investigation.

Review of the Literature

I reviewed the literature in search of recent and pertinent research that related to the experiences and developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants in rural schools. I took three main steps in conducting my literature review. First, I carried out a broad search of the literature to establish that previous research, relevant to the problem,

existed. Second, I sought articles, research, and earlier writings to develop a conceptual framework. Finally, I delved into the topics of rural education, first-year teaching, and mentoring to increase my understanding of these issues, methodologies, and recommendations for further research. My search led me to current research, published between 2012 and 2017; seminal writings; consistent details; and resonating insight about the experiences of first-year teachers in rural schools as well as the need to continue to learn about the relationship between mentoring and increased teacher effectiveness.

To conduct the literature review, I searched several education databases available through the Walden Library, including the Education Resources Information Center, Education Research Complete, and SAGE publications. To start my searches, I used varying combinations of the keywords: *first-year teachers*, *mentoring*, *induction*, *teaching effectiveness*, *rural teachers*, and *rural schools*. I also used other prompts based on the keywords and main ideas that authors emphasized in their articles, and these terms included *student achievement*, *beginning teachers*, *teacher retention*, and *teacher recruitment*. To find current research and pertinent articles related to the conceptual framework, I used the keywords of *adult learning*, *andragogy*, and *constructivism* in combination with the previously listed terms. I turned to Google Scholar when I could not find a resource related to the combination of keywords I was looking for in the databases. I also used Google Scholar to find articles that were cited in materials I read but could not find in the databases.

I started this literature review as I developed the proposal for this study, and in the subsequent process of collecting and analyzing data, I continued to add references to

peer-reviewed literature published within the past 5 years. This ongoing review allowed me to replace some of the earlier references with current articles. However, I maintained references that provided critical guidance to the development of the proposal for this study and non-peer-reviewed reports when they provided contextual information that I could not find in current articles. I also referred to several seminal writings to set a historical context for the conceptual framework of this study. I knew I was approaching saturation in my quest for relevant research and resources when my review became cyclical and citations led to writings I had previously studied.

I will begin this literature review with a description of the conceptual framework and then proceed to an overview of the problem. Next, I will discuss recent research related to the experiences of first-year teachers in rural settings and the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Following Creswell's (2012) recommendation, I constructed a literature map to organize the main ideas in light of the research findings. I concentrated on rural settings in my search of the literature but discovered that the lack of understanding about the effectiveness of mentoring extends to diverse teaching situations, and so I also explored the local problem from the perspective of all first-year teachers. In this literature review, I will outline a clear connection between the conceptual framework, built on adult learning and constructivism, and the need to increase the understanding about the experiences and developing effectiveness of teachers in this study.

Conceptual Framework

I conducted this study within a conceptual framework that joins andragogy and constructivism. The theory of andragogy focuses on the education of adults, and the

theory of constructivism involves building understanding based on previous experiences combined with the discovery of new information (Hartle, Baviskar, & Smith, 2012; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011, 2015). I traced the shared underpinnings of both theories to the writing of John Dewey (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Dewey, 1910, 1916; Green & Ballard, 2011). I wove Dewey's ideas about adult learning into the framework of my investigation of first-year teachers as they began their career in a partnership with an NDTSS mentor.

Andragogy. My review of the literature related to andragogy and first-year teachers outlined a progression of ideas and insights about self-directed adult learners that distinguished andragogy from pedagogy. In pedagogy, the teacher decides what the learner needs to know, while in andragogy, the learner must be actively involved and connected to the learning (Knowles et al., 2015). There is a continuum between pedagogy and andragogy, across which adult learners move depending on their learning situation (O'Toole & Essex, 2012). Although first-year teachers often begin their career as pedagogical learners, the need to learn how to cope with the countless new experiences and gaps in their teaching repertoire nudges them toward andragogy (Kinghorn, 2014; McGrath, 2009; Spangler, 2013). Lindeman (1926) explained that the adult learner's experiences, setting, and need to know, provide the motivation to learn. Lindeman's writing influenced Knowles (1970) who defined andragogy as the "art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 38). Knowles et al. (2015) continued to research and refine ideas about adult learning stating that, with maturity, an individual's learning needs change and are associated with experience, motivation, and urgency. An andragogical approach may

be beneficial for learners of all ages, but with the goal of understanding first-year teachers, I focused on how andragogy applies to adult learners (see Akin & Asir, 2013; Knowles et al., 2015; O'Toole & Essex, 2012).

Knowles et al.'s (2015) description of the "andragogy in practice model" (p. 80) can be applied to the NDTSS participants. The three levels of this model address the learners' needs and experiences and include "goals and purpose for learning, individual and situational differences, and andragogy: core adult learning principles" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 79). Knowles et al. presented these levels as three concentric levels with goals and purposes as the outer level, individual differences in the middle, and adult learning principles in the center (p. 80). With a focus on educational settings, I applied this model to the teachers in this study with the outer level comprising the learning goals of first-year teachers in the state, the middle level including the situations of rural teachers, and the inner level consisting of the specific experiences and needs of each first-year teacher.

Andragogical core learning principles can lead to effective learning and positive change for teachers (Peppers, 2015). These principles include "(1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness, to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn" (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015, p. 6). Knowles et al. (2015) explained that adult learners need to know "the how, the what, and the why of learning" (p. 171). I traced Knowles et al.'s explanation back to Dewey (1910, 1916) who discussed purposeful, disciplined, continued learning motivated by a genuine interest that is tied closely to the learner's

position in life. Dewey's emphasis on relevance persists as a significant component of meaningful and effective professional learning, but what is relevant to one teacher is not necessarily relevant to another. A recent study focused on secondary teachers in 11 Dutch schools revealed that motivations for professional learning "varied in what, how, and why they want to learn" (Louws, Meirink, van Veen, & van Driel, 2017, p. 190). Louws et al. (2017) also noted that motivation to pursue professional learning topics were at least partially related to years of teaching experience with new and veteran teachers showing a preference for focusing on classroom climate and management. In addition to years of experience, the setting, content area, and school schedules also influence the direction of andragogical learning that can lead to positive changes in teaching practice (Livingston, 2012; Styslinger, Clary, & Oglan, 2015). Embedding relevance in professional learning appears to strengthen intrinsic motivation for teachers because it allows them to quickly put their learning in action in ways that might improve their classroom practice (Louws et al., 2017; Wasonga, Wanzare, & Dawo, 2015).

There are different connections and interactions among the andragogical core learning principles that show how first-year teachers are motivated and ready to learn what has relevance to their classroom practice (Kinghorn, 2014; Livingston, 2014; O'Toole & Essex, 2012). For example, a study of elementary science teachers in Northern California revealed that challenges in classroom practice alerted teachers to the need to learn more about content and or teaching strategies (Kinghorn, 2014). Kinghorn (2014) also noted, however, that even among elementary science teachers, barriers, and therefore, supports to effective teaching varied. Harju and Niemi (2016) investigated the

professional learning needs of new teachers starting their careers in Finland, the United Kingdom, Portugal, and Belgium, and the authors found there were common and unique areas of professional learning priorities, depending on the teaching context of the teachers. For first-year teachers, relationships with mentors who are effective classroom teachers may provide powerful motivation and guidance for growth and continued learning within the andragogical framework (Huisman, Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Kono, 2012; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson 2010).

The practice of reflection strengthens the potential of mentoring to motivate andragogical learning because first-year teachers can internalize and incorporate their learning to improve teaching effectiveness (Bettencourt, 2012; Dewey, 1916). A group of researchers who examined an induction program, which like the NDTSS program used the NTC model as guidance for program development, reported that a positive mentoring relationship “uniquely related positively to self-reflection” (LoCasale-Crouch, Davis, Wiens, & Pianta, 2012, p. 314). First-year teachers can use the practice of reflection to accelerate their readiness to learn and transfer what they are learning to their teaching practice (Kayapinar, 2016; Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles et al. (2015) emphasized that learning readiness can be prompted by strategies that orient the learners to be more successful in their setting. Within an andragogical framework, reflection and practice can lead to meaningful adult learning wherein adult learners orient themselves to acquiring the appropriate skills, information, and perspectives to improve their situation (Kayapinar, 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2012).

My review of the NDTSS mentoring program and support materials showed many consistencies with an andragogical framework. Mentors in the NDTSS mentoring program focus on concerns directly related to the classroom practices of first-year teachers (NDESPB, 2014). In addition, NDTSS mentors use observations, conversations, and reflection to guide first-year teachers to understand and improve their teaching effectiveness (NDESPB, 2014). These practices address the andragogical principles described by Knowles et al. (2015) because mentors and first-year teachers use their experiences, self-concept, and the relevance of their day-to-day struggles and successes to continue to learn (NDESPB, 2014). The link between andragogy and the NDTSS approach to mentoring draws attention to the transformative nature of adult learning as first-year teachers develop the necessary skills to improve their teaching effectiveness.

Constructivism. Dewey's writings bridge the ideas of andragogy and constructivism to complete the conceptual framework. Constructivism can be described using Dewey's (1916) call to build, or construct, "new experience into intellectual habitudes" (p. 206). Seminal writings of Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky have contributed to the understanding of constructivism (Hartle et al., 2012; Ültanir, 2012). Dewey (1910, 1916) wrote about the importance of experience, Bruner (2006) emphasized relevance and active involvement, and Vygotsky (1978) described the educational benefits of progressing beyond an individual's current level of understanding in collaboration with others. While these components of constructivism are meaningful for all learners, Dewey (1910) emphasized that adults have a level of urgency and specificity that most young learners do not possess. Within these perspectives, constructivism compliments

andragogy to build a framework that supports adult learners pressed to build their understanding through the interchange of experience, social exchange, and individual reflection (Jackson, 2009). Knowles et al. (2015) also acknowledged similarities between constructivism and andragogy especially in terms of the active role of the adult learner in “experiential learning and problem-solving approaches to learning” (p. 178).

I described the significance of reflection in the subsection on andragogy, and in this subsection, I will explore the significance of professional dialogue and collaboration in light of constructivism. Professional dialogue allows learners to discuss their experiences, build new understanding, and increase collaboration (Bills, Giles, & Rogers, 2016; Lloyd, 2013; Watkins, 2015). Dialogue also fosters collaboration, which is consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) emphasis on social interaction as a part of constructing new knowledge. In a qualitative case study, Roff (2012) examined mentoring programs in two New York school districts and identified the potential of collaboration to benefit both mentors and new teachers in their classroom practice. Similarly, Giles, Wilson, and Elias (2010) focused on an induction program that included action research and mentoring and noted, “professional dialogue emerged as the glue of action research, giving life to inquiry enhancing reflection, and deepening the professional community” (p. 99). More recently, McNally (2016) explained that discussions aimed at improving student learning also strengthened the mentoring relationship. The NDTSS mentoring program incorporates professional discourse into the required protocol and requires mentors to maintain conference logs (see Appendix B) that document those conversations.

When considering the experiences of the NDTSS participants in this study, connections between constructivism and andragogy strengthen the conceptual framework. In andragogy, learners use experience to build relevance, motivation, and orientation to learning; whereas, in constructivism, learners build and develop understanding from experience through social interaction and reflection (Bettencourt, 2012; Knowles et al., 2015). For first-year teachers, the myriad new experiences can be overwhelming without the support of a mentor to provide guidance and encouragement to improve teaching effectiveness (Danielson, 2007). In mentoring partnerships, social interaction, in the form of professional dialogues, can help a first-year teacher build an understanding of how to improve his or her teaching effectiveness. One tool for improving effectiveness is Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching effectiveness, which Danielson based on constructivism to describe "the purposeful nature of teaching" (p. 25). Danielson's framework is one of the resources and training tools that help mentors guide discussions and facilitate reflections with first-year teachers (NDESPB, 2014).

The process of combining experience, dialogue, and reflection to build understanding and improve teaching effectiveness is complicated, exhausting work that has the potential to be transformative and rewarding (Danielson, 2007; Roff, 2012; Spangler, 2013). An examination of this process, within a conceptual framework built on andragogy and bolstered by constructivism, guided my investigation of one group of teachers starting their careers. Within this conceptual framework, continued review of the

literature focused on first-year teachers, mentoring, and teaching effectiveness illuminates the experiences of the NDTSS participants in rural settings.

The Experiences of First-Year Teachers

Although I focused on first-year teachers in rural settings, I started my literature review by seeking research on the broader experiences of first-year teachers in any setting. Teachers often start their careers with excitement, idealism, and sometimes, expectations that are unrealistic (Moir et al., 2009; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). For some teachers, however, the end of the first year of teaching is already nearing the end of their teaching career. Ingersoll (2012) reported that nearly 50% of first-year teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years of teaching. While other literature reports lower numbers regarding attrition rates, there appears to be a consensus that new teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession than veteran teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014; Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014). A look at research focused on new teacher attrition provides insight on the challenges of first-year teachers.

Schaefer et al. (2014) used narrative inquiry to probe into the reasons why four beginning teachers in Canada and the United States left teaching early in their careers and proposed that the teachers might leave teaching for reasons that are complex and often unexpressed. Some of the underlying reasons revealed by Schaefer et al. included struggles to maintain personal family life, keep up with heavy workloads, build relationships with colleagues, and work with administrators who were preoccupied or unsupportive. Similarly, in a single case study aimed at learning about coping mechanisms that might reduce attrition, Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) described one

Chicago Spanish teacher's challenges dealing with insufficient support within the school, developing lessons, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, and coping with classroom management. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis explained, however, that the Spanish teacher did not leave teaching as a result of the struggles, but persevered in finding supports to deal with the challenges of first-year teaching and move on to the next year.

Recurring depictions of teaching challenges appear in the literature describing research focused on first-year teachers across the United States. Legette (2013) surveyed 101 music teachers across the state of Georgia to learn about their perceptions regarding their preservice education and first years of teaching. Analysis of the survey responses revealed that the most challenging aspects of beginning teaching included lack of resources, classroom management, large class sizes, and workload (Legette, 2013). Similarly, Elliott, Dainty, and Jones (2017) surveyed Kansas high school agriculture teachers in a study focused on teacher retention. Among the first-year teaching challenges that the 105 respondents identified were time constraints, responsibilities beyond classroom teaching, and keeping up with grading and other responsibilities (Elliott et al., 2017).

As I reviewed the literature, I gained insight into the struggles of first-year teaching, as well as the means by which teachers work through those struggles. Legette (2013) identified factors that facilitated first-year music teachers' transition from student to teacher that included student teaching experiences, collaboration with other music teachers, and support from colleagues, administrators, mentors, and family. Likewise, support from administration and positive relationships in the school and community were

factors that eased the challenges of first-year agricultural teachers (Elliott et al., 2017). As a final example, Gourneau (2014) reported that six first-year teachers in a midwestern teacher residency program experienced hurdles in five common areas as they worked through their first year with a mentor. Those areas included “classroom/time management, working with parents and other family members, differentiating instruction, handling difficult student behaviors, and how to effectively assess student learning” (Gourneau, 2014, p. 299). Gourneau outlined the strategies and supports the teachers used to deal with each of the identified challenges and build enthusiasm for their second year of teaching.

The experiences of first-year teachers cover a broad spectrum of challenges and rewards. The research has led to an increasing awareness that leaving first-year teachers to fend for themselves is not practical in terms of teaching effectiveness, economic sensibility, or teacher retention (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ingersoll, 2012; Moir et al., 2009; Scherer, 2012). While there is more to learn about how mentoring can improve teaching effectiveness, findings from my literature review indicate that strong mentoring programs can provide constructive feedback, emotional support, and guidance through the maze of school policies and regulations that typically accompany the first year of teaching (Curry, Webb & Latham, 2016; Ingersoll, 2012; Pogodzinski, 2014).

The experiences of first-year teachers in rural settings. Some experiences seem universal for first-year teachers, whether they are teaching in an inner-city classroom or a remote, country school within the United States or a different country (Boakye & Ampiah, 2017; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Mhishi, Bhukuvhani, & Sana,

2012). Experiences that include feelings of isolation and concerns about workload, teaching strategies, assessments, and classroom management are ubiquitous in the literature describing first-year teachers. For this study, however, an examination of the experiences of first-year teachers in rural settings is crucial. Hellsten, Prytula, and Ebanks (2009) said that research focusing on the experiences of first-year teachers in rural schools is sparse. Hellsten et al.'s findings were corroborated by Burton, Brown, and Johnson (2013) who reviewed 48 articles, published between 1970 and 2010, related to rural teaching and emphasized the importance of continued research related to rural teaching. In a study that resulted in the comparison of urban and rural teachers, Preston (2012) recommended further research to learn more about the relationship between teaching context and struggles with teaching, relationships within the school and community, and previous experience.

As I reviewed the literature, I found that teachers who begin their careers in rural schools experience some professional and personal challenges and rewards that may be linked to their rural context. In fact, there are times when teachers find rewards and challenges related to the same issue. Goodpaster et al. (2012) described this phenomenon by saying that experiences of teaching in a rural setting “could be perceived as ‘double-edged swords’” (p. 21). Examples of such aspects of rural teaching included relationships with students, parents, and administrators, issues related to classroom practice, and location of the rural community (Goodpaster et al., 2012).

The experience of isolation can take on different dimensions for first-year teachers in rural settings. The teacher might be the only new person hired in the school,

the only person teaching a particular subject, or one of the few teachers who has not lived in the community for an extended time (Gagon & Mattingly, 2015; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2009; Hellsten et al., 2011). In addition, many rural schools are located far from other learning institutions and offer limited access to professional development (Eckert & Petrone, 2013; Goodpaster et al., 2012). Countering the problem of isolation in small, rural schools is the potential for close personal relationships with students, staff, parents, and community members. Goodpaster et al. (2012) analyzed transcripts from a focus group interview with six high school science, technology, engineering, and mathematics teachers in rural Indiana schools to learn about attrition and retention in rural schools. The participants identified benefits and drawbacks to teaching in a rural setting (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Benefits related to building relationships included having opportunities to work closely with staff and administration, more access to parents, chances to develop a deeper understanding of student interests, and the ability to watch students grow and develop within the small school setting (Goodpaster et al., 2012).

Goodpaster et al. (2012) noted that teachers also described challenges related to community relationships in terms of struggling to feel accepted and striving to find privacy within a tight-knit community. Other challenges of rural teaching included dealing with resistance to change and motivating students to excel (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Through the analysis of a questionnaire and other written documents prepared by pre-service teachers assigned to rural settings, Azano and Stewart (2015) reported similar findings regarding the benefits and challenges of teaching in rural settings. Although

Azano and Stewart focused on pre-service teachers rather than teachers in their first year, the results were consistent with Goodpaster et al.'s results. Azano and Stewart explained that while only two of the four pre-service teachers had experienced rural schools as students, all found student and community relationships to be valuable components of their experience. The pre-service teachers also expressed frustrations with knowing how to motivate low-performing students (Azano & Stewart, 2015). While the teachers who had experienced rural schools as students felt better prepared for their assignment, Azano and Stewart emphasized that even if teachers had lacked such experience, they could find success in a rural setting. Goodpaster et al. also acknowledged that with “enough intrinsic motivation and proper guidance on how to assimilate into the community” (p. 20), teachers without previous rural school experience can be effective.

Rural schools do share some common characteristics that may influence the experiences of first-year teachers. Compared to urban and suburban settings, rural class sizes are often smaller (Miller, 2012), schools feel safer (Goodpaster et al., 2012), and opportunities to develop relationships with students are more likely (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Additionally, rural schools are often more challenging to staff (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015), have fewer resources (Smeaton & Waters, 2013), and present teachers with heavy workloads (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013). While it is important to be aware of these similarities, it is also crucial to remember that each school is unique. In an analysis of state equity plans, Gagnon and Mattingly (2015) reported earlier research that identified shared qualities of rural communities, but also noted that “rural communities are extremely diverse across the country” (p. 3). Miller and

Hellsten (2017) followed a first-year teacher employed through two part-time contracts in two very different schools in rural Saskatchewan, and they stressed that significant variations can exist between two seemingly similar rural settings. The teacher experienced positive parent interactions and opportunities to develop effective teaching skills in one setting but struggled to work with parents and to motivate students in the other, because even though the districts were within commuting distance, there were considerable differences in the school and community settings (Miller & Hellsten, 2017).

Miller (2012) analyzed public school data from the New York State Education Department to learn about teacher employment in rural areas. Miller stated that “teachers not only select a school when choosing a job but also a community” (p. 26). While this statement supported his findings that teachers might be attracted to specific rural communities in New York State, it also emphasized the significance of place for teachers starting their careers in rural settings. The importance of place in pedagogical practice related to rural teaching was described by Azano and Stewart (2015) and earlier by White (2008), and both emphasized the need to provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of students in rural settings.

Added to the challenges that first-year teachers in small, rural schools are likely to encounter, it is imperative to consider the students who comprise their classrooms. In the United States, over 9 million diverse students attend rural schools (Johnson, Snowalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014). Strange, Johnson, Snowalter, and Klein (2012) said, “growth in rural school enrollment is outpacing non-rural enrollment growth in the United States, and rural schools are becoming more complex with increasing rates of poverty, diversity,

and special needs students” (p. 20). Such complexity leads to diversity among rural schools that cannot be ignored when considering the experiences of teachers and students (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). Recalling the strength of relationships in rural schools, the potential of mentoring to support first-year teachers is considerable (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013).

Mentoring for first-year teachers. There is widespread consensus among the literature that teachers will benefit from mentoring that is part of an extensive induction program aimed at educating, supporting, and guiding first-year teachers. Ingersoll (2012) referred to the promise of improved teaching, student achievement, and teacher retention as the result of some mentoring programs. Indeed, teacher retention, especially during the first years of teaching, is a goal of some mentoring programs (Ingersoll, 2012; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). However, there is variation among mentoring and induction programs, which can result in varied success in supporting and retaining new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Successful programs include mentors who have the time and training to work through an intense and focused program with first-year teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Schmidt, Young, Cassidy, Wang, & Laguarda, 2017; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). The next three subsections highlight findings from the literature regarding the mentoring relationship and connections to developing teacher effectiveness for first-year teachers in rural settings.

The mentoring partnership. I began this portion of the literature review with a focus on how the mentor and design of the mentoring program may impact the success of

a mentoring partnership. Moir et al. (2009) said that mentors who are “exemplary teachers” are the “heart” (p. 25) of the mentoring model. Stanulis and Bell (2017) and Ingersoll (2012) emphasized that first-year teachers need support throughout their first years of teaching. In fact, both authors referred to the detriments of a “sink or swim” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47; Stanulis & Bell, 2017, p. 59) approach first-year teaching where the beginning teacher is left to deal with challenges alone. In a description of a mentoring framework, Stanulis and Bell described the importance of developing trust through careful listening, targeted questioning, constructive feedback, and open-mindedness.

In addition to a strong and supportive mentor, the research also points to designating time for mentors and first-year teachers to meet. More specifically, meetings that include discussions focused on pedagogical practices, student learning, and teaching standards strengthen mentoring and can lead to improved practice (Frels, Reichwein Zientek, & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). Mentors also need time to observe first-year teachers in their classroom and then follow up with feedback and suggestions for improvement (Ingersoll, 2012; West-Burns, Murray, & Watt, 2013). A review of the literature showed that a mentoring relationship built on trust within a mentoring framework designed to build effective teaching practice holds the promise of improving the teaching experience and effectiveness of new teachers.

A comparison of two studies that focused on the perceptions of mentors, first-year teachers, and administrators provided some insight into the balance of the mentoring relationship and program design. Roff (2012) interviewed three mentors, three first-year teachers, and two administrators from two different schools in New York state. Analysis

of the interview transcripts and other documents revealed that all stakeholders believed the mentoring program was beneficial to mentors and first-year teachers, but Roff also identified several concerns that emerged during analysis of the data. Participants identified benefits to working with the mentors to include improving teaching practices and having a trusted colleague to turn to for support and guidance (Roff, 2012). Roff explained that overall, perceptions regarding the mentoring program were positive; however, two areas of concern acknowledgement emerged to include perceptions of insufficient time to work together and the lack of a mentor within the same content area.

Frels et al. (2017) also examined perceptions of mentors, first-year teachers, and principals in a mixed-methods study to learn about mentoring experiences. In an analysis of surveys submitted by 998 first-year teachers as well as 791 mentors and 73 principals selected from a large Texas school district through purposeful sampling, Frels et al. found that perceptions of the mentoring partnership varied by role and grade level. The perceptions of the mentors were more favorable about the mentoring experience than the perceptions of the mentees, and beginning teachers at the elementary grades were more likely to want to be mentored than teachers in Grades 7 through 12 (Frels et al., 2013). Additional findings pointed to insights about factors that can strengthen the mentoring relationship. Similar to Roff's (2012) findings, Frels et al. reported the importance of time to meet and suggested additional benefits when the mentor and new teacher shared the same content area of grade level.

Other research also supports the idea that mentoring partnerships tend to be stronger when the mentor and first-year teacher share similar teaching situations

regarding grade level and content area and have designated time to collaborate. McNally (2016) researched an online mentoring program for beginning science teachers that included observation cycles using video recordings of classroom practice. The eight participants, who were beginning their careers in six different states, reported that they valued the honest, supportive, and content-specific feedback from their science-teacher mentors (McNally, 2016). It was interesting to note, however, that the science teachers did not emphasize science content in their discussions compared to other classroom practices (McNally, 2016). In contrast, a case study designed to investigate mentoring that was specific to content areas among 16 mentors and the new teachers with whom they worked, showed that the pairs of mentors and new teachers emphasized content-specific conversations as a way to build teaching effectiveness (Achinstein & Davis, 2014).

As an additional example to the value of the mentoring partnership, Kahrs and Wells (2012) used a mixed-methods approach to learn about which aspects of the mentoring partnership were most important to the professional growth of new teachers. Using the analysis of survey results along with interviews with five beginning teachers and their mentors, Kahrs and Wells explained that while all new teachers benefited from the support of their mentors, they craved more feedback and clarity for strengthening their practice. The process of mentoring new teachers is complex, and there is more to learn about which components of a mentoring relationship are the most powerful influences in improving the experiences and effectiveness of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012; Kahrs & Wells, 2012). Kahrs and Wells acknowledged, “Each teaching context

and each mentoring relationship is different, with unique needs and challenges” (p. 48). With this understanding, a look at the context of mentoring reveals the challenges and benefits of mentoring programs in rural schools.

Mentoring in rural settings. Mentors can facilitate the transition of first-year teachers in a rural teaching position and increase the likelihood that teachers will stay in rural schools (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kono, 2012). The results of a mixed-methods study focused on the relationship between teacher retention and participation in a mentoring program showed that mentoring could not only increase retention, but help beginning teachers acclimate to their rural settings in school and the community (Adams & Woods, 2015). In addition to determining that 56% of the teachers, who participated in the mentoring program between 2004 and 2006, were still teaching in Alaska 5 years later, Adams and Woods (2015) analyzed interview transcripts and showed that the participants credited their mentoring experience as a support during their early years of teaching.

Adams and Woods (2015) stressed the importance of mentoring programs that not only include support for practices in the classroom but also for understanding and participating in the community. Similarly, Kono (2012) learned that mentoring in rural settings was most beneficial when the program helped teachers develop the skills to find success in their classroom as well as support in the social setting of their rural communities. Kono interviewed 45 principals in South Dakota and 62 teachers who were starting or seeking their first teaching positions to learn about perceptions regarding teaching traits that lead to success in the classroom as well as teaching positions that were

appealing to beginning teachers. By comparing the results of the principal and first-year teacher surveys, Kono proposed that effective mentoring programs should be “focused on meeting both school needs of principals and the social and personal needs of new teachers” (p. 132).

Earlier in this review, I cited research that identified some of the particular stresses of teaching in rural schools. Although literature related to mentoring in rural schools is sparse, there is evidence to support the benefits of mentoring in rural settings to support teaching practice and improve retention. Earlier research by Hellsten et al. (2011) revealed the potential of mentors to help first-year teachers cope with professional and social isolation. However, Hellsten et al. also noted difficulties of pairing mentors with first-year teachers in some small schools, and explained that some teachers sought support from colleagues in an informal mentoring partnership. When a school’s teaching staff is small, distances are large, and access to mentors are challenging, mentoring programs still hold the potential to support and retain teachers as they develop their teaching effectiveness, but there is more to learn about how to support first-year teachers most effectively in their rural setting (Adams & Wood, 2015; Hellsten et al., 2011; Wechlser, Caspary, Humphrey, & Matsko, 2015).

Mentoring and teacher effectiveness. I searched for recent literature related to mentoring and teacher effectiveness from the perspective of student achievement as well as teacher practices. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) explained the challenge of pairing participation in a mentoring program with student success saying, “The activities of an induction program [including mentoring] are at least one step removed from the students”

(p. 220). However, it appears that evidence is mounting to show connections between mentoring and improved student achievement. In a Colorado program where mentoring was carried out by retired teachers, math and reading achievement scores for students of beginning teachers in the mentoring program exceeded the scores of students taught by beginning teachers who were not in the program (DeCesare, McClelland, & Randel, 2017). Similarly, Illinois and Florida students whose teachers participated in a structured two-year induction program showed higher achievement scores compared to students of teachers in a control group (Schmidt et al., 2017). Interestingly, despite the increased achievement scores, DeCesare et al.'s (2017) results did not show that participation in the mentoring program increased teacher retention or evaluation results.

Adams and Woods (2015) explained that as teachers in rural Alaska schools worked with their mentors to explore teaching practices; they developed a “sense of teacher efficacy” (p. 258) in their classroom practice. These findings are particularly telling in light of earlier research linking self-efficacy, which is the teachers’ self-concept regarding teaching effectiveness, to student achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Indeed, Armor et al. (1976) found a link between a teacher’s strong sense of self-efficacy and improved student reading achievement. Subsequently, Hoy and Spero (2005) noted that, for most teachers, self-efficacy rose during student teaching, and then fell during the first year of teaching, unless those teachers had mentors.

Measuring teacher effectiveness is a complex undertaking, which requires the examination of multiple measures (Danielson, 2007; Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012).

Analysis of classroom observations, conversation logs, student surveys, and work samples provide several ways to monitor teaching effectiveness (Goe et al., 2012; Kardos & Moore-Johnson, 2010). Assessing a teacher's effectiveness is an arduous and complicated undertaking, but, with an eye on mentoring, Feiman-Nemser (2012) suggested shifting the focus of mentoring research from teacher retention to teacher and student learning. My literature review amplified this call with recommendations for continued studies that examine mentoring through multiple measures of teaching effectiveness (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kardos-Moore-Johnson, 2010).

In summary, findings of current research substantiate the fact that robust, structured mentoring programs can improve the experiences of first-year teachers (Adams & Woods, 2015; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Stanulis & Bell, 2017). My review of the literature revealed consistencies between mentoring and a conceptual framework constructed with the andragogical learning principles identified by Knowles et al., (2015). Mentoring partnerships focused on improving teaching practices kindle first-year teachers' excitement, increases their sense of efficacy, and provides motivation to learn within their professional setting (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kono, 2012; Stanulis & Bell, 2017; Watson, 2012). Structured mentoring partnerships also fit within a constructivist framework because of the focus on experiential learning and social interactions (see Moir, 2009; Shernoff et al., 2011). Moir et al. (2009) qualified such interactions stating that mentoring partnerships "incorporate both the passion of first-year teachers and the expertise of experienced teachers to ensure that all students in America receive the best education" (p. 19). Whether in remote communities in North Dakota or anywhere else in

the world, my literature review revealed a need to continue to learn about how mentoring can strengthen the experiences and effectiveness of first-year teachers.

Implications

The findings of this literature review and the subsequent case study showed that there are rewards and challenges of teaching in rural schools. Furthermore, components of a strong mentoring program are likely to support the development of effective teaching practices and ease the journey through the first year. While an analysis of interview transcripts, surveys, and conference logs revealed many shared experiences of beginning teachers, it also showed that, in some ways, each teacher's experiences through their first year of teaching are unique. I used the results of this study to develop a professional development project for teachers in rural schools who are participating in the mentoring program. Following the andragogical framework of this study, I varied the course in content and format to meet the immediate needs of new teachers throughout the school year. I developed resources that address the common experiences of new teachers and teachers in rural settings. In acknowledgment of the unique experiences of each teacher, I also incorporated resources that include professional organizations, and other supports into the project along that will allow new teachers to connect with others in the same content area, grade level, or extracurricular assignment.

The results of this project study provided insight into the thoughts, actions, and incredibly busy schedules of one group of first-year teachers who volunteered to participate in this case study. These teachers shared a bit of their teaching journey and contributed to an increased understanding of their, and likely other teachers', experiences

in similar circumstances. I designed the professional development project to meet the shared and unique needs of the rural NDTSS participants to provide additional supports and resources that might strengthen the first-year experiences of teachers in rural schools across the state.

Summary

In this study, I addressed the local need to learn more about the relationship between participation in the NDTSS mentoring program and the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural schools in North Dakota. Beyond this local problem, however, the need to fill the gaps in understanding about this relationship extends to classrooms around the world. There are multitudes of challenges that first-year teachers encounter in rural schools ranging from geographic and professional isolation to limited resources and demanding workloads (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Kono, 2012; Miller & Hellsten, 2017; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Without appropriate support, many teachers who struggle with the challenges of new teaching leave the profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Ingersoll, 2012; Shaefer et al., 2014). Although strong mentoring programs hold the potential to improve the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers, there is more to learn about the components of mentoring programs that will lead to improved teaching effectiveness (Adams & Woods, 2015; Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; McNally, 2016). With an eye on rural teaching, Miller and Hellsten (2017) stressed the importance of “research that takes up the larger social and economic forces organizing life within rural communities” (p. 43). Research findings on the topic of first-year teaching in rural schools, as well as the

call for continued research, provided me with the guidance and motivation to learn more about the NDTSS participants in rural schools.

In the remainder of this paper, I will provide a thorough overview of the steps I took to answer the research questions that I posed in this section and to develop a project based on the findings of my research. In Section 2, I will describe the methodology of this case study by reviewing the research design, participants, data collection, and analysis. Next, I will explain the results of the data analysis. I will describe the professional development project that I designed after analyzing the data in Section 3. Finally, in Section 4, I will provide reflections and conclusions about this study.

Section 2: The Methodology

In the first section, I described the importance of learning more about the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers starting their careers in rural North Dakota schools. Findings from my literature review emphasized the importance of supporting these teachers and pointed to the potential of mentoring programs to provide that support and increase retention. A plan to analyze data from a cohort of first-year teachers showed the promise of developing a deep understanding of how participation in the NDTSS mentoring program influenced the experiences of one group of rural teachers.

During the 2014–2015 school year, 159 teachers in rural schools across the state participated in the NDTSS mentoring program (NDTSS, 2017a). Initially, I proposed this study as a mixed-methods design that would combine the qualitative and quantitative analyses of interview transcripts, conference logs, and performance scores. After receiving approval from Walden University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I invited all 159 teachers to participate in the study with the intention of following a detailed plan for subsequent purposeful sampling. My plan underestimated the busy schedules of the new teachers and their mentors, and the number of consenting volunteers was not sufficient to follow the proposed plan for inferential statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Wanting to proceed with this research, I returned to the literature to develop and propose changes that would allow me to use the data from the consenting teachers in a case study research design. Once I received approval from Walden University’s IRB to implement the changes, I proceeded with a case study design and approach that allowed

me to study the bounded case of first-year teachers who volunteered to participate in the study.

I will begin this section with a description of a qualitative case study and how the design of this study aligned to the stated problem and research questions. Next, I will describe the selection of participants and the measures I applied to protect their rights, and then I will outline and justify the data sources and the strategies I used to collect and analyze the data. Finally, I will review the results and findings of the data analysis, which give insight to one group of teachers and contribute to original research about the experiences of first-year teachers in rural schools.

Research Design and Approach

The case study design allowed me to conduct a thorough investigation of the experiences, conversations, and reflections of one group of teachers in the NDTSS mentoring program. The design was consistent with the purpose of this study because it allowed a thorough exploration of the teachers during a specific timeframe (see Glesne, 2011). This case study approach aligned with Creswell's (2012) rationale of understanding "an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 478) and permitted me to learn about the teachers' experiences without interfering in their natural teaching contexts (see Yin, 2013). The data that were available for analysis included interview transcripts, conference logs, performance rubrics, and results from the NDTSS survey. Such a variety of data sources can lead to a study that is "richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information" (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 16). I collected the data at various points during the school year,

which allowed me to compare the teachers' experiences with expected experiences during of the first year of teaching (see Moir, 1999). Since “any and all methods of gathering data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 42) are acceptable in case study research, this approach was appropriate to address the research questions in this study.

I developed the questions that guided this study to inquire how one group of teachers described their experiences in rural schools and the mentoring program. Yin (2013) explained that “how or why” (p. 4) questions can often be explored through a case study research design. In this project study, I was able to add depth to the story of how one group of teachers described their experiences in the mentoring program (see Simons, 2009). The idea of the story can serve as an “integrating metaphor for the process of case study” (Simons, 2009, p. 1). The story is not fictional; rather, it provides a means to learn about the “origin, development, and achievements at a particular time” (Simons, 2009, p. 1). Before delving into the details of this research design that helped to reveal the story of the teachers in this study, I will summarize an overview of the tradition of the case study research.

An Overview of Case Study Research

My review of the literature showed that although case study research “has different meanings for different people and in different disciplines” (Simons, 2009, p. 19), it has made a mark in educational research. To narrow my overview, I will discuss case study research within the realm of qualitative research, which is consistent with the explanations of Creswell (2012), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Simons (2009), and Hancock and Algozzine (2011). This overview is not intended to be comprehensive but

rather to highlight some of the applications and explanations of the case study tradition as an appropriate means to address the research questions in this study.

Simons (2009) marked the latter part of the 1960s and the 1970s as the time when references to case study research for the evaluation of educational programs began to appear in the literature. In a summary of the history of case study research in education, Simons pointed to the work of Robert Stake. In an article about the evaluation of educational programs, Stake (1967) said, “we need excellent books and excellent teachers, but our methods of recognizing excellence are inadequate” (p. 2). Stake called researchers to “commit ourselves to a more complete description” (p. 3) and explained, “a full evaluation results in a story, supported perhaps by statistics and profiles” (p. 5). Without using the phrase *case study*, Stake continued that such an evaluation would “reveal perceptions and judgments that different groups and individuals hold” (p. 5).

Subsequent definitions offer additional details about case study research. An early definition posed by MacDonald and Walker (1975) described a case study as “the examination of an instance in action” (p. 2). Stake (1995) defined a case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Yin (2013) developed a two-part definition of the term, and in summary, stated, “case study research comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis (p. 17). Like Yin, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to methodology in their definition when they said a case study is “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). Although these definitions vary,

they all address the importance of developing a deep understanding of a case.

Just as there are varied definitions of a case study, there are also different ways to describe a case. Creswell (2012) explained that a case could be “a single individual, several individuals separately or in a group, a program, events, or activities” (p. 465) that are “bounded . . . or separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p. 465). Bounding a case segregates the focus of the study from its broader context (Yin, 2013). For example, Bell-Robertson (2014) studied a case comprised of 11 teachers bounded by their participation in an online community within a large community of novice music teachers. Eargle (2013) investigated the case of four social studies teachers among the staff of one rural school, and Edward-Groves (2014) focused on a case consisting of two teachers from a group of new teachers participating in a mentoring program in Australia. These instances demonstrate applications of the case study design to study cases similar to those that I presented in my stated research questions aimed at exploring the experiences of new teachers in rural North Dakota schools.

The Case Study Design

After changing my proposed methodology from mixed-methods to a case study, I developed a formal design to strengthen and facilitate my journey through this process. My review of the literature revealed that there are a series of decisions that can fortify and clarify a case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2013). In this section, I will identify five elements of case study design proposed by Yin (2013) as they apply to this study. Then, I will explain the decisions that led to the development of this descriptive, embedded, single case study. I relied heavily on Yin’s

recommendations as I developed the design of this study, but I also drew on other research to refine, support, and justify my design.

Elements of the case study design. The first two parts of the case study research design require the development of research questions followed by the identification of propositions, which provide direction to the study (Yin, 2013). Baxter and Jack (2008) compared propositions to hypotheses because they both provide potential answers to research questions. Propositions, however, “predict a directionality for the results” (Ellis & Levy, 2009, p. 331), which is not always the case for hypotheses. Propositions can also provide guidance and focus during the research process (Yin, 2013). Using findings from a review of the literature, I arrived at the following propositions to coincide with each research question:

RQ1: How do first-year teachers describe their experiences of teaching in a rural school?

Proposition 1: The teachers will indicate that their rural setting presents unique challenges and benefits to their teaching experiences.

RQ2. How do first-year teachers in rural schools describe their experiences in the mentoring program?

Proposition 2: Participation in the mentoring program will level some of the expected challenges identified within Moir’s (1999) phases of first-year teaching.

Proposition 3: Participation in the mentoring program will facilitate professional learning that is consistent with the theory of andragogy.

Subquestion: What can be understood about the developing effectiveness

of teachers in rural schools who participate in the NDTSS mentoring program?

Proposition 4: First-year teachers in the mentoring program will show evidence that they are developing and discussing practices that are consistent with effective teaching as described by Danielson's (2007) framework for effective teaching.

The research questions set the stage for the research design, and the development of propositions provided direction for the collection and analysis of data (see Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013).

The third element in the research design was to define the case, or “unit of analysis” (Yin, 2013, p. 283). In this study, the rural classroom teachers in the NDTSS program who consented to participate in at least one of the data collection processes comprised the case. This case was bounded by geography because it only included rural teachers in North Dakota, by experience because it only included first-year teachers in the mentoring program, and by time because the study followed the teachers from the beginning to the end of the academic year.

The fourth element in the research design involved the identification of connections between the data and the propositions (Yin, 2013). I verified these connections by reviewing the data that were available for analysis. The interview transcripts included information related to teaching in a rural setting, working with a mentor, changes that occurred over the course of the school year, professional learning, and changes in teaching practice. The conference logs held documentation of challenges

and celebrations over the year, discussions about teaching practice, and plans for professional learning. The performance rubrics allowed a glimpse into the teachers' changing teaching practices. The survey data, released to me by the NDTSS, offered information about the mentoring experience, changes in teaching practice, and teachers' plans for the next year.

The fifth element of the case study design entailed identifying “criteria for interpreting the findings” (Yin, 2013, p. 283). To accomplish this task, Yin (2013) suggested developing “rival explanations” (p. 36) because they have the potential to strengthen the study if the research can reject the rival explanations during data analysis.

Two rival explanations to my propositions are summarized as follows:

1. First-year teachers in rural schools will not indicate any evidence that their rural setting presents unique challenges or benefits to their teaching experiences.
2. Participation in the mentoring program does not ease the experiences of first-year teaching or improve developing teacher effectiveness.

Overview of descriptive, embedded, single case design. With the components of the research design identified, the rationale for the overall design fell into place. The literature described a variety of case study types, but three frequently listed distinctions include explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive types (Baxter & Jack, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2013). Explanatory studies are designed to explain causation within a setting, and exploratory studies are often used to prepare for further research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). This case study of rural teachers is descriptive because I

set out to “present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 37). In a study focused on mentors in one school district, Stanulis and Brondyk (2013) conducted a descriptive case study to understand the interaction of factors that led to differences in the mentoring practices. In a similar quest to increase understanding, I explored the interaction of the factors associated with first-year teaching, rural settings, and mentoring that influenced the new teachers’ experiences.

In this descriptive study, I also followed a single, rather than multiple, case design. My bounded case included a group of teachers, but the focus of the study was on their collective, rather than unique experiences. I reviewed five criteria, set forth by Yin (2013), to determine whether a single case study approach was appropriate to address the local problem of lack of understanding about first-year teaching and mentoring in rural schools. Meeting one of the criteria would have justified the selection of a single case design (see Yin, 2013). However, I deduced that the case of rural teachers fit three of Yin’s (2013) criteria because it was “critical” (p. 50), “common” (p. 51), and “longitudinal” (p. 53). The case was critical because it was limited to teachers who provided data to indicate whether the propositions that I identified in the design pertained to their experiences, and it was common because it was set in rural schools where they taught each day (see Yin, 2013). The case was also longitudinal because I collected performance rubrics and sets of dated conference logs at the end of each semester to look for changes over the year (see Yin, 2013).

Finally, this study was an embedded, rather than a holistic design because it included “embedded units of analysis” (see Yin, 2013, p. 267). While a holistic design focuses on one unit of analysis, an embedded design incorporates more than one (Yazan, 2015). These units of analysis provide additional “layers” (p. 267) in the form of data that relate to the main unit of analysis. In this case study, the main unit of analysis was the group of teachers whom I interviewed in this study. This study included three embedded units that contributed data to the interview transcripts (see Yin, 2013). One unit included the teacher and mentor pairs who released conference logs for analysis. A second unit included a small group of mentors who supplied performance rubrics about the teachers they were mentoring. The third unit represented a larger group of teachers from rural schools that completed the end of the year NDTSS survey. Including the three embedded units coincided with the methods of data collection approved by Walden University’s IRB, and increased the potential to add clarity and increase understanding about the main case (see Baxter and Jack 2009).

Justification for Using the Case Study Design and Approach

To offer justification for adopting a case study design, I will describe why this was the most suitable design to address the research problem with the data that were available for analysis. I will begin by addressing the originally proposed mixed-methods design. Next, I will explain why other qualitative designs would have been less effective approaches than a case study design to examine the stated problem of lack of understanding about teachers in the mentoring program beginning their careers in rural schools. Finally, I will summarize examples of recent case studies that have been used to

investigate cases that are, at least in some ways, similar to the cases in this study.

A mixed-methods approach would have included the inferential data analysis of performance rubric scores and conference log entries that were completed by the mentors. Combining the inferential analyses with the descriptive analyses and qualitative stories of the teachers' experiences could have added depth to the study (see Ormand, 2011; White & Kline, 2012). As mentioned previously in this section, however, there were not enough consenting participants to conduct the inferential statistical analyses with validity. Although a mixed-methods approach may be feasible and valuable in the future, this design was not an accurate way to investigate the teachers in this study.

While it is true that the inferential analysis of quantitative data may have enriched the results of this study, a qualitative approach was essential to answer the research questions and increase understanding about the experiences of the teachers in this study (see Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Five types of qualitative research approaches include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A review of the approaches, other than case study, showed that design characteristics made each one less appropriate than the case study approach.

Although a narrative approach tells the story of an individual or a group of individuals, it is most commonly used to explore information about the person, rather than a particular occurrence in their life (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The lives of the individual teachers were not the focus of this study. Rather, the focus was on their experiences as first-year teachers in rural schools. A phenomenological study does

focus on one experience that is common to a group of individuals (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Such an approach was not appropriate for this study, however, because, in this study, I was examining the three shared experiences of being a new teacher, having a mentor, and teaching in a rural school. Grounded theory research is applied with the goal of building a theory (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this study, however, was to increase understanding, not to develop a theory. Ethnography, like grounded theory research, usually focuses on a large group of participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An ethnographic study is different from the other approaches because the focus is a “group that shares the same culture” (Creswell, 2013, p. 104). While the group of teachers in this study may have shared similar cultures in their rural schools, they did not interact with each other, and the focus of the study was not their culture, but their experiences.

The case study approach, which is designed to “develop an in-depth description and analysis of a case . . . providing in-depth understanding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 104) fit the purpose of this study better than the other qualitative designs. With access to a variety of data, I was able to focus on a small group of teachers bounded by experience, setting, and time to increase understanding of their experiences. Researchers have used case study designs in recent years to increase understanding about first-year teachers, teaching in rural schools, and mentoring situations.

First-year science teachers (Saka, Southerland, Kittleson, & Hunter, 2013; Sickel, 2015), new history teachers (Martell, 2013), and beginning music teachers (Bell-Robertson, 2014) comprised cases in different studies designed to increase the

understanding of the experiences of teaching in a particular content area. Teachers in rural settings from North Carolina (Burton et al., 2013), to the upper Midwestern United States (Waller & Barrentine, 2015), to Scotland (Elliot & Campbell, 2013), made up cases in studies focused on teaching experiences and instructional practices. Furthermore, researchers used case study designs to investigate mentoring programs centered on communication between mentors and new teachers (Bang & Luft, 2014; Edward-Groves, 2014), differences in mentoring practices within one system (Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013), and content-specific mentoring (Achinstein & Davis, 2014). The teachers in the preceding examples were bounded within a larger context such as a system, a content area, or a specific length of time. Researchers designed these case studies to increase understanding of experiences and practices of teachers through the analysis of multiple data sources. Likewise, in this study, I analyzed multiple sources of data to describe the experiences of one group of teachers as they journeyed through their first year of teaching in rural schools.

Participants

When selecting participants, I followed my proposed approach for a mixed-methods study. At the end of the recruitment phase, 18 teachers consented to participate in at least one portion of the investigation. The number of participants, which was too small to follow the mixed-methods design, precipitated the changes that allowed me to investigate and describe this group of teachers in a case study. In this section, I will outline the procedures I followed to select, gain access to, and establish contact with those participants who formed the bounded case. I will also explain how I maintained a

working relationship with the participants and protected their rights throughout the study.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

The population and setting for this study included the first-year teachers enrolled in the NDTSS mentoring program and the rural schools where they taught during the 2014–2015 school year. I invited all teachers who met the three criteria of being a first-year teacher, a rural teacher, and an NDTSS participant to participate in this study. I could identify enrollment in the mentoring program and first-year teacher status by using the participant list released by NDTSS. To designate rural schools, I used a broad definition that would grant access to as many teachers as possible.

My review of the literature showed varied definitions for rural (Miller, 2012; Rural School and Community Trust, 2013). In this study, I acknowledged the possibility of a rural setting for all schools except for those in North Dakota's largest locales. I described the focus on rural schools in my correspondence with potential participants. As such, there was a component of self-identification as a rural teacher among those who consented to share their experiences. Although I could have limited my selection to schools that qualified for the Small Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA), my rationale for inviting teachers from schools in rural settings that did not qualify for the SRSA program was to acquire a large pool of participants to strengthen the mixed-methods sampling practices. After transitioning to a case study design, I obtained Walden University's IRB approval to include all consenting teachers.

Although I used three criteria to invite teachers to participate in this study, there were additional factors related to the setting and participants that I considered when

describing this bounded case. A contextual qualification may have distinguished the participating rural schools from other rural schools in the state. While the distinction is beyond the scope of this study, it is worthy of mention. Teachers could only participate in the voluntary NDTSS program if the school administrator enrolled and participated in NDTSS training. In addition, of the 159 teachers whom I invited to participate in the study, 18 consented, and only 12 participated in at least one part of this study. Of those 12, 11 participated in an interview and formed the bounded case. It is possible, and again, worth noting that the experiences, perspectives, or interests of those teachers were different from those who did not participate. Therefore, this case of teachers was bounded, not only by a rural setting and by enrollment in the NDTSS program, but also by their choice to participate in this study.

I did not conduct sampling techniques to define this case because the group of consenting teachers was small enough that analyzing the associated data was manageable (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Stake's (1995) explanation that sometimes, there is "no 'choice' at all" (p. 3) when it comes to selecting the case was true for this study. The group of consenting teachers from the NDTSS participant list formed a case that I could investigate in this descriptive study. Yin (2013) said, "rather than thinking about your case as a sample, you should think of it as the opportunity to shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or principles," (p. 40). The teachers who comprised the single case in this study did not represent all first-year teachers in all rural schools in the state. Nonetheless, their participation in this study allowed me to describe their experiences with the promise of increasing understanding as well as illuminating ideas and practices

to support beginning teachers in the future.

Gaining Access to Participants

Knowing that the first year of teaching can be busy and overwhelming, I designed my study so teachers could choose to participate in one or all parts of the study. This strategy was consistent with Yin's (2013) reminder that in case study research, the collection of data normally takes place within the day-to-day routines of the participants, and it is important to give priority to the convenience of the participants rather than the researcher. I invited each teacher to consent to participate in an interview. I also invited them to allow their mentors to release conference logs (see Appendix B) and or complete a 10-point performance rubric (see Appendix C) at the end of each semester. I informed the teachers that if they participated in more than one portion of the study, I would not link their identities from one set of data to another.

During fall 2014, I followed the steps that were approved by Walden University's IRB to contact the potential participants for this study. The NDTSS coordinator released the names and e-mail addresses of teachers and mentors enrolled in the NDTSS program who were teaching in rural schools. She also forwarded a letter, written by me, to alert the teachers and mentors that I would be writing by e-mail to invite them to participate in my doctoral study. In my subsequent correspondence, I described the study in an introductory letter, sent a letter of informed consent, and invited the teachers to consent to participate. I followed Walden University's IRB approved protocol and sent up to three reminders unless the teachers asked me to stop correspondence. The last step in gaining access to the teachers was to request consent from the mentors of teachers who consented

to participate in the conference log or performance rubric portions of the study. I did not investigate the mentors in the study, but their consent was required to complete and release either set of documents for this study. Again, I sent up to three reminders, and if the mentors did not consent, I did not include the first-year teachers in those portions of the study.

Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

I established and maintained a working relationship with the case of first-year teachers by following, and adapting when necessary, a sequence of predetermined steps to establish credibility and trust. I began by developing a strategy for contacting the participants with the NDTSS coordinator. Farquhar (2012) pointed out, “you need the participating organization more than they need you” (p. 53). Working with the coordinator was crucial in gaining access to the participants, and it provided a juncture where I could establish credibility with them, as someone trusted by the NDTSS coordinator. In an additional effort to build a relationship with the potential participants, I tried to acknowledge the common experiences I shared with them as a teacher, but this approach seemed ineffective because I focused my correspondence on the details of the study. Therefore, I requested and received permission from Walden University’s IRB to revise my final reminder and included a short video of me in my classroom explaining my study and asking teachers to consider participating in my study.

Once I was corresponding with the consenting teachers and their mentors, I used e-mail and U.S. Postal Service mail to share details of the study. After careful reflection on the responses of some of the teachers and mentors who declined to participate in the

study, I developed a better understanding of the many obligations that filled the teachers' days. I kept e-mail correspondence to a minimum to avoid disrupting their schedules, but I provided occasional updates and reminders about the study and encouraged the participants to contact me if they had additional information or questions.

From the beginning to the end of my contact with the participants, I acknowledged the importance of the information they were sharing and provided a summary of the interviews, as a member check, with each teacher before moving to the final analysis (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Because the case of teachers was so small, I also requested and received approval from Walden University's IRB to give a \$20 Amazon gift card to participating teachers and their mentors as a token of my appreciation for their contributions to the study. Perhaps the most important component of maintaining the researcher-participant relationship was describing and following the measures outlined in the letter of informed consent, which among other things, ensured that I would protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

A Description of the Participants

Twelve teachers participated in this study. Of the 12, six consented to release their conference logs, five consented to the completion of performance rubrics, and 11 took part in an interview. Two teachers participated in a face-to-face interview, two in a telephone interview, and seven responded to interview questions by e-mail. Half of the participating teachers were less than 25 years of age. All of the teachers taught in schools with an enrollment of less than 600, and only two taught in districts with more than 600 students. Each quadrant of North Dakota was represented in towns that ranged in

population size from less than 100 to 4,500 people in counties that ranged in population density from 1.8 to 14.3 people per square miles (CensusViewer, 2011a, 2011b; IndexMundi, 2015). Table 2 shows some of the demographic information of the teachers who participated in one or more parts of this study. In addition to the participating first-year teachers, eight mentors consented to submit rubrics and seven consented to submit conference logs. Of those mentors, five submitted fall and spring performance rubrics and six submitted completed conference logs each semester.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participating First-Year Teachers

Characteristics	Number of Teachers
School Student Enrollment Range	
51-200 students	6
201-600 students	6
District Student Enrollment Range	
51-400 students	8
401-1000 students	4
Grade Levels of Teaching	
PK-6	2
7-8	2
7-12	6
K-12	2
Gender of Participants	
Female	7
Male	4
Age Range of Participants	
Under 25 years	6
26-30 years	3
Over 30 years	2
Location of school district (by state quadrant)	
NW	2
SW	3
NE	4
SE	3
Population of towns	
50-500 people	3
501-1000 people	5
1000-2000 people	2
2000-5000 people	2
Population density of counties (people/m ²)	
1.5 -3 people/m ²	3
3.1-6 people/m ²	4
6.1-9 people/m ²	3
9.1-15 people/m ²	2

Note. One teacher did not share age or gender.

Sources: CensusViewer, 2011a, 2011b; IndexMundi, 2015

The participation of the mentors in this study was instrumental in addressing the research questions in two different ways. Most importantly, the mentors submitted the conference logs, which provided documentation of each conference (see NDESPB, 2014). According to the NDTSS mentor training manual, “the purpose of the log is to record the highlights of the conversation so both the mentor and first-year teacher can refer to it later” (NDESPB, 2014, p. 64). Following each conference, the mentor was required to give a copy of the log to the first-year teacher (NDESPB, 2014). The mentor training manual did not ask mentors to record their interpretations or perceptions. The mentors were just required to document the conversations by recording the perceptions, responses, and plans identified by the first-year teacher (NDESPB, 2014). Therefore, I used information from the conference logs to help inform the research questions about the first-year teachers’ perceptions of their experiences.

Mentors also participated in the study by completing and submitting performance rubrics. Six participating mentors documented their perceptions about the developing effectiveness of the teachers they worked with by completing performance rubrics at the end of the fall and spring semesters. Of the six submitted sets of rubrics, I omitted one set due to completion errors. Analysis of the performance rubrics informed the subquestion addressing the developing effectiveness of the first-year teachers. While I wrote the two main research questions to learn about the perceptions of the first-year teachers, I wrote the subquestion simply to inquire what could be understood about the developing effectiveness of the new teachers. The mentors’ rubric scores added insight as I analyzed additional data to address the sub question.

Protection of Participants' Rights

I protected the participants' rights by employing various measures that put the first-year teachers' trust, respect, and safety as an unalterable concern in every step of this study. In this section, I will highlight how I assured the participants of confidentiality, protection from harm, informed consent, and hopefully, the opportunity to reflect on their mentoring experience safely and constructively. I am a teacher in a rural school in North Dakota, and so, one level of protection rested on my desire to maintain my professional reputation as a trusted teacher leader. My goal as a new researcher was to carry out a meaningful, reliable study that would bring about positive change to the teaching profession. While this personal level of protection may have been admirable, it did not carry the same weight as the protection required by the NDTSS and Walden University's IRB that I was obligated to establish before I contacted participants or collected data.

Before contacting the first-year teachers and their mentors, I reviewed my plans for data collection, analysis, and storage with the NDTSS coordinator. The coordinator wrote a letter of cooperation granting her approval for me to contact the 2014-2015 NDTSS teachers and mentors and invite them to participate in the study. Working with the NDTSS coordinator provided a foundation of "trust and credibility," which is "a necessary part of field relations" (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 266). Receiving approval from Walden University's IRB (Walden IRB Approval No. 09I24I14I0263024) for data collection and analysis added the necessary scaffolding to protect the rights of the participants. As a part of the IRB approval process, I provided assurances that I would keep the data I collected for the study in my possession and

separated from the data that the NDTSS collected and used.

During the process of contacting potential participants and throughout the study, I used a Google account that I established solely for this study. In the letter of informed consent, which I e-mailed to potential participants, I introduced myself, provided an overview of the study and its purpose, and highlighted the potential benefits and risks of involvement (see Creswell, 2009). In the overview, I explained the plans for data collection, analysis, and review as well as how I would share the findings of the study. In my introduction, I identified myself as a teacher in a rural school, and as a member of a state board, but stated those roles were separate from my doctoral study. I also included assurances that confidentiality would be a priority and that participants could leave the study at any time without penalty (see Creswell, 2009). When the teachers granted consent to release conference logs or performance rubrics, I sent a letter of informed consent to the mentors inviting their participation and offering assurances that I would also protect their confidentiality.

While collecting data from the participants, the methods I followed to protect confidentiality varied slightly depending on whether the data were in paper or digital form. I assigned each first-year teacher a unique numeric code for the performance rubrics, and alphabetical code conference logs, which I collected twice during the school year. I informed the mentors of the codes and invited them to use them instead of the teacher's name. When I received the completed logs and rubrics from the mentor, I reviewed each one, replaced remaining names with the appropriate codes, and blacked out references to names of towns, schools, or other teachers. I used pseudonyms, selected

from an online name generator, for each interview participant. In all cases, I identified the schools, towns, and counties by state quadrant and population range. I stored digital files in a password-protected file on my computer, and paper and electronic storage devices in a locked safe (see Tracy, 2010).

While analyzing the data, I kept each source of data separate, so I did not link the story of one teacher among the interview transcripts, conference logs, or performance rubrics. This approach was consistent with my original mixed-methods design, but it also provided a level of protection of confidentiality for the participants. Since only four of the teachers participated in all three portions of the study, the risk of inadvertently including identifying details was reduced by treating each data source as a separate unit of analysis rather than connecting all sources to one teacher. I shared summaries of each teacher's interview with the participating teacher as a member check to build trust with the participants as well as credibility in my data analysis (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following the procedure approved by Walden University's IRB, the NDTSS coordinator reviewed de-identified interview summaries to provide assurances that I had not breached confidentiality regarding schools or participants. At the completion of this study, I deleted the teachers' contact information, converted the files from my computer to a password-protected external storage device, and I will store it with the other files in a locked safe for 5 years, as required by Walden University.

This study presented other risks to the participants beyond the breach of confidentiality. Those risks included stress to the mentors who might have worried about being evaluated by the NDTSS coordinator, stress to first-year teachers who participated

in an interview at the end of the school year when schedules are hectic, and concern that I would share the data in a way that could compromise future employment. I did not collect rubrics or conference logs, nor did I conduct interviews without consent and voluntary participation. Therefore, if the assurances regarding the protection of confidentiality were not sufficient or concerns about the extra work prevailed, the participants had the choice to decline to participate or to remove themselves from the study at any time if the extra work became overwhelming.

Participation in this study required extra time and effort beyond the usual workday for the participants. However, the possibility existed that their role in the study would be beneficial because of the opportunity to reflect on the experiences and practices of first-year teaching (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The potential of this study to offer meaningful insight into the experiences and effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural schools depended on the quality of the data that I collected over 1 school year. In addition to following the levels of protection mentioned above, I made every effort to present myself, and every aspect of this study, in a professional, respectful manner that personified my sincere interest in enhancing understanding about the first-year teachers in the state (see Tracy, 2013).

Data Collection

In the previous section, I briefly introduced the data sources that I collected from the participants in this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that in qualitative research, “data are collected through interviews, observations, and documents” (p. 42). I did not collect data through observations in this study, but in addition to the 11 interview

transcripts, I analyzed documents that informed the research questions by adding additional perspectives as well as insight into the experiences and perceptions of the teachers over the course of the school year. These documents consisted of six sets of conference logs, five sets of performance rubrics, and responses to the end of year NDTSS survey, which were released to me by the NDTSS coordinator. In addition to the documents that were completed by first-year teachers and mentors, I used documents that I constructed during initial content analysis of the logs, surveys, and rubrics. Merriam and Tisdell explained that “quantitative data produced by the investigator also fall into this category of documents” (p. 174). In my research, these documents showed the frequencies and types of responses that related to the propositions.

In this section, I will describe my overall data collection strategy, provide details about each data source, and explain the systems I used to keep track of the data and the understandings that emerged from those data. My two research questions inquired about the perceptions of first-year teachers related to their experiences as rural teachers and participants in the mentoring program, so it was crucial that I used data that reflected their perceptions. Although the conference logs were submitted by the mentors, the logs provided documentation of the conversations that took place between the mentor and first-year teacher (NDESPB, 2014). As such, the logs provided insight into the challenges, successes, and next steps that were identified by the first-year teachers during those conferences. I used the rubric scores, which reflected the perceptions of the mentors, as part of the evidence to address the sub question and learn more about the developing effectiveness of the teachers through their first year.

Strategy for Data Collection

The data sources I used in this study fit within the required activities of the mentors and first-year teachers. It was important to me, and the NDTSS coordinator, to develop a strategy for data collection that would be as nondisruptive as possible to the first-year teachers and their mentors who were already busy with the NDTSS program and their teaching practices. Since the mentors, who received a stipend from NDTSS, were required to observe the teachers and conduct conferences on a regular basis, the practices were already in place to provide a logical source of data and did not require a significant amount of extra work for the participants.

The practice of collecting multiple sources of data can lead to the “development of converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2013, p. 119), which can increase the reliability of the study. Table 3 shows the alignment between the data sources and units of analysis. The primary unit of analysis was the group of 11 teachers who participated in the interviews, however, the other three units of analysis provided data that enriched the analytical process. I collected all data during the 2014 – 2015 school year. Although I collected each set of data separately, I ensured that at least three data sources aligned in some way with each of the propositions I identified in the design of this study. Table 4 shows the relationship between the data sources and propositions. One proposition addressed teaching in a rural setting, and the other propositions addressed the experiences and developing effectiveness of the first-year teachers.

Table 3

Data Sources and Relationship to Units of Analysis and Participants

Data sources	Interviews	Conference Logs	Performance Rubrics	NDTSS Survey data
Units of analysis	FYTs in rural schools	FYT-mentor pairs	Mentors	FYTs in rural schools
Number of participants	11	6	5	154
Collection time frame	April to June	End of semester	End of semester	May to June
Collection method	Recorded or e-mailed	Mentors mailed by USPS	Mentors mailed by USPS	Released in NDTSS

Note: I used the abbreviations FYT for first-year teachers and USPS for U.S. Postal Service.

Table 4

Relationship Between Data Sources and Propositions

Propositions	Interviews	Conference Logs	Performance Rubrics	NDTSS Survey data
P1. Rural setting	Responses about rural teaching	References to rural teaching		Responses about teaching plans
P2. First-year teaching and mentoring	Responses about changes in experiences during year	References consistent with Moir's phases		Responses about mentoring
P3. Professional learning	Responses about professional learning	References to professional learning experiences		Responses about professional learning
P4. Developing effectiveness	Responses about teaching practice	References to Danielson's domains	Scores for indicators	Responses about teaching practice

Note: I used the abbreviation P for propositions.

I used Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching and Danielson's (2007) framework for effective teaching to add guidance and consistency to the process of data collection and analysis. Moir's phases of first-year teaching provided a point of reference as I analyzed the teachers' experiences, and Danielson's framework guided my analysis of the teachers' developing effectiveness and professional learning. These guidelines also connected the study to the NDTSS program. During the 2014-2015 NDTSS mentor training, the trainers focused on Danielson's framework for teaching and Moir's phases of first-year teaching (NDESPB, 2014). Therefore, before I describe the four data sources that I collected in this study, I will provide a brief description of the guidelines that allowed me to connect the subunits of data during this investigation.

Danielson's framework for teaching. Danielson's framework for teaching was a component of the NDTSS mentor training and handbook (NDESPB, 2014). Danielson (2013) developed the framework for effective teaching in 1996, and has refined and updated it in subsequent years. Danielson's framework for teaching has been used to describe teaching practices (Evans, Wills, & Moretti, 2015). Moreover, Danielson stated that the framework "identifies those aspects of a teacher's responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting student learning" (p. 3). Danielson (2007) organized the framework into these four domains: "planning and preparation," "classroom environment," "instruction," and "professional responsibilities" (p. 1). Each domain consists of "components," which are organized and explained in the form of "two to five elements" (Danielson, 2007, p 1). The structure of Danielson's framework consists of "four levels of performance – unsatisfactory, basic,

proficient, and distinguished” (p. 41). These levels include descriptions of performance for each element, and Danielson stressed that they apply to “levels of performance of teaching, not of teachers” (p. 39). I designed the levels of performance rubric (see Appendix C) to replicate the arrangement of Danielson’s rubric as it appeared in the mentor training handbook (NDESPB, 2014).

Researchers have also connected Danielson’s framework with teaching effectiveness (Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006; Hinchey, 2010; Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2011). Research focused on a pilot evaluation program in Chicago public schools showed that achievement increased for students enrolled in classrooms of teachers who scored highest on Danielson’s framework (Sartain et al., 2011). A new evaluation tool in the Chicago schools, still based on Danielson’s framework, continued to show similar results, especially in schools with the “high levels of capacity in the school building in order to affect student learning” (Jiang, Sartain, Spote, & Steinberg, 2014, p. 4). Tyler, Taylor, Kane, and Wooten (2010) found “some of the strongest evidence to date” (p. 259) that a relationship existed between student achievement and observation scores using Danielson’s framework. Further research showed that student achievement, as measured by math test scores, increased during the year of evaluation and even more the year following evaluation hinting at the promise of using effective evaluation frameworks to improve teaching effectiveness (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

The NDTSS coordinator allowed leeway regarding the tools that mentors used to guide conferences and provide feedback to the first-year teachers because some of the participating schools used the Marzano (2011) evaluation model or the Marshall (2014)

teacher evaluation rubric, rather than Danielson's framework. The mentor-training manual instructed mentors to "choose the best tool to use for taking notes during the observation" (NDESPB, 2014, p. 93). However, during the planning stages of this study, it was expected that most first-year teacher/mentor pairs, would use Danielson's framework to guide the process of observation, feedback, and discussion for the school year (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, July 16, 2014). In preparation for the possibility that some of the mentor/teacher pairs would refer to Marzano or Marshall's evaluation guides, I located a crosswalk, to ensure that I could identify Danielson's domains even if a mentor noted references to Marshall or Marzano (Office of Clinical Experiences at Rowan University, n.d.).

Moir's phases of first-year teaching. Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching provide descriptions of experiences that can be expected during the first year starting with anticipation, followed by survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and once again, anticipation. The literature provides examples of how the phases can help to increase the understanding of the experiences of preservice and first-year teachers. Meijer, Graaf, and Meirink (2011) noted that the phases served as a reference for student teachers in the Netherlands as they discussed their experiences with their supervisors. Meijer et al. explained that the phases guided conversations about "what it means to that particular student teacher to be or become a teacher" (p. 124). Pertinent to this study, Meijer et al. identified the connection between the first-year teacher's experiences and his or her progress through the challenges of becoming a teacher. Similarly, in a study focused on learning about the experiences of preservice agricultural education teachers in

Ohio Paulsen, Anderson, & Tweeton (2015) showed that the participants' experiences aligned closely with Moir's phases. From the perspective of a professor of teacher education returning to the classroom, Reynolds (2015) used Moir's phases of first-year teaching to analyze and document his teaching experiences. The NDTSS mentor's manual provided descriptions of each phase (NDESPB, 2014). As a part of the mentor training, the trainers outlined the phases to help mentors understand the attitudes, or phases, which are typical of first-year teachers during the school year (NDESPB, 2014). As the mentors learned about the phases, they discussed the descriptions in the manual.

Data Sources

I used four different data sources to address the four propositions that I presented in this case study. I collected the data during the 2014-2015 school year. The data that I collected from the four sources converged to tell the story of the bounded case of first-year teachers in this study. In this section, I will provide an overview of each data source in the order that I collected them starting with conference logs, then interviews, performance rubrics, and NDTSS survey results.

Conference logs. I collected the conference logs to learn about the topics of conversation between mentors and first-year teacher as well as to learn about changes, progress, struggles, and developing effectiveness of the teachers as they worked through the school year. The NDTSS mentor handbook specified that mentors and first-year teachers were to meet for at least 15 hours of conferencing each semester and that at least 13 hours required documentation in the form of conference logs (NDESPB, 2014). The training manual explained that the mentors completed the conference logs to provide

digital or paper documentation of the conference, and then provided a copy of the log to the first-year teacher after the meeting (NDESPB, 2014). The NDTSS program required mentors to record the components of the conference in seven sections of the logs (see Appendix B). These sections included the teachers' perceptions regarding, "what I feel good about," "what feels most challenging," "focus for today," "domains you are working with today," and "teacher's next steps," the "mentor's next steps," and "next meeting date" (NDESPB, 2014, p. 68). In addition to the required components, the logs included optional sections that included "progress from last conference," "possible solutions," and "resource ideas" (NDESPB, 2014, p. 68). The documentation of these topics provided a consistent means to inform the propositions related to teaching effectiveness, first-year teaching, and working with a mentor. Some comments also provided insight into the experiences of rural teaching.

Interviews. I interviewed consenting teachers in the NDTSS mentoring program to obtain data, in the form of responses to open-ended questions, about their experiences as first-year teachers in rural schools. While the conference logs provided insight to the participants' experiences on a nearly weekly basis, the interviews, conducted at the end of the school year, allowed the teachers to reflect on the entire year and respond to questions that were designed to inform all four propositions. When I requested a change to the case study design, I also requested and received approval from Walden University's IRB to change the interview protocol and allow the teachers to choose to participate in a synchronous or asynchronous interview rather than being assigned to one format by me. I pursued this change based on findings of Kramer and Xie (2008) who

found there are advantages to allowing participants to select the interview form that they preferred.

While providing participants the choice of a synchronous or asynchronous interview format may have resulted in slightly different types of replies, my goal was to gain a thorough understanding of the first-year teachers' experiences. Kitchenham and Chasteauneuf (2010) conducted interviews in Northern Canada through 12 face-to-face and 15 telephone interviews when studying teacher retention and recruitment in remote areas of Northern Canada. Although the researchers carried out the interviews in different ways, they reported the results together in their qualitative findings (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010). Opendakker (2006) explained that while telephone interviews prohibit viewing facial gestures and body language, vocal changes are still discernable. Since I was striving to learn about the experiences of NDTSS participants in rural schools, meeting face-to-face with the teachers was not as important as gathering multiple responses to the same open-ended questions (Opendakker, 2006).

Some teachers in this study who opted to participate in the asynchronous interviews shared reasons for doing so that included wanting time to consider their answers and not having time to meet synchronously. E-mail interviews offered several advantages that included greater access to participants, flexibility in scheduling, and increased time for reflection when responding to questions (see Kramer & Xie, 2008; Meho, 2006; Opendakker, 2006). This form also reduced the time required to transcribe the interviews and increased the convenience for follow-up questions. Although e-mail interviews did not allow for visual or vocal cues, participants could portray emotions

through capitalization, punctuation, and the use of emoticons, such as smiling or frowning faces (see Kramer & Xie, 2008; Meho, 2006). I offered the participants the choice of responding to questions with an attached document or directly in the e-mail to provide more choice with the goal of increasing “retention and rapport” (Kramer & Xie, 2008, p. 274).

I developed eight open-ended interview questions and several follow-up questions (see Appendix D) to obtain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the teachers in this study (see Zost, 2010). I wrote the questions to address each proposition by focusing on teaching in a rural setting, working with a mentor, andragogical learning, and the educational parameters of Danielson’s framework and Moir’s phases. The responses to the interview questions provided context and depth to the findings that were revealed as I analyzed the other data sources.

Performance rubrics. I intended the performance rubrics (see Appendix C) to provide a measure of developing effectiveness of 10 qualities of teaching by comparing fall and spring scores. I developed the rubrics with guidance from the NDTSS coordinator who suggested elements from Danielson’s (2007) framework that had been frequent topics of discussions between mentors and first-year teachers in the past (L. Stenehjem, personal communication, July 22, 2013). The rubric topics focused on teaching effectiveness and professional learning. I arranged the rubric in a format that was similar to the NDTSS (NDESPB, 2014) mentor’s handbook and Danielson’s (2007) framework.

To follow the same format as the mentoring handbook, I did not include

Danielson's (2007) four performance titles of "unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished" (p. 41). However, I included the four corresponding descriptions that matched the levels ranging from unsatisfactory to distinguished for each of the 10 items (see Appendix C). I also added a 12-point scale by dividing each of the four levels into three gradations to allow the mentors to indicate whether the teacher was low, average, or high within the designated level of performance. I added the 12-point rubric so that the mentor could be more specific when completing the rubric and so even small growth could be measured from fall to spring semester. Five first-year teachers and their mentors completed this portion of the study. Although the results were meager because of low participation, they provided a different view of the mentoring experience than the other data offered and helped to shed light on the proposition related to teaching effectiveness.

NDTSS survey responses. As part of the program evaluation process, the NDTSS coordinator created a survey and sent it to all NDTSS first-year teachers, mentors, and administrators at the end of the 2014–2015 school year. The coordinator offered to release the results of the anonymous survey to me during the 2014–2015 school year. I submitted her letter of cooperation to Walden University's IRB and obtained permission to use these data. The first-year teacher survey included 15 questions that requested information about gender, teaching assignments, feedback regarding the teachers' perception about time commitments, value of the program, most valuable components of the program, and least valuable components of the program. The survey also included two open-ended questions inviting the teachers to give feedback to their mentors and NDTSS. The survey included responses from 154 rural teachers, although

not all teachers responded to all parts of the survey. The purpose of the survey was to inform the NDTSS coordinator about the perceptions of NDTSS participants. I analyzed the survey responses to address all four propositions.

Data Management

In addition to assuring that I had multiple sources of data to triangulate and corroborate the findings of this study, I developed a management process to collect, record, and store the data and my accompanying notes. This process allowed me to develop a “case study database – a formal assembly of evidence” (Yin, 2013, p. 102), which I used to analyze and ultimately organize and present my findings. In case study research, data management is a crucial precursor to data analysis, but management can also initiate the process of analysis because the researcher begins to identify emerging codes and understandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the next section, I will describe how I implemented the steps identified by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as “data preparation, data identification, and data manipulation” (p. 214) to manage the data.

Conference logs. After receiving consent from the first-year teachers and their mentors, the mentors were my only contact with these sets of data. The mentors completed and mailed the sets of logs (see Appendix B) to me at the end of each semester. Data preparation includes tasks such as transcription and simple organization to present the data in a format that is ready for identification (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To begin data preparation, I ensured that the documents were free of names and other identifying factors. I organized the logs by alphabetical identifiers, which connected fall and spring sets of conference logs and noted the demographic information that I included

in Table 2. To complete the preparation of these data, I converted references to Danielson's domains for each log when mentors noted Marzano or Marshall's domains, as the focus of conversation (see Office of Clinical Experiences at Rowan University, n.d.).

Data identification is the process of "assigning codes to segments of your interviews, field notes, documents, and audio or video files" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 221). I began this process by reviewing comments on each log to identify connections to Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching. I copied relevant phrases in a notebook and color-coded them to correspond with each of the five phases. I used the description of Moir's phases in the mentor handbook as a guide (NDESPB, 2014). I placed my handwritten notes in a data notebook organized by the identifiers. Next, I constructed a spreadsheet for each set of logs. The spreadsheets included a table consisting of five columns for each of Moir's phases and rows for each conference log identified by date. The spreadsheet also included a column to record the domain from Danielson's framework that the mentor identified as the focus of conversation for each conference. I transferred the information from my notes to the spreadsheet. To continue with data identification, I reviewed each set of conference logs and highlighted references that matched descriptions to Danielson's domains. As a guide, I used rubrics in the NDTSS mentor handbook and Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching. For each log, I noted the domain, element, and keywords from Danielson's framework along with mentors' comments from the logs and abbreviations for emerging codes. I added these notes to the data notebook.

Next, I reviewed the logs in search of comments that related to the six andragogical principles of adult learning (see Knowles et al., 2015). I used Knowles et al.'s (2015) summaries as a guide and highlighted comments that aligned to the principles. I placed the notes in the data notebook and organized the notes in a table on my computer. I reviewed the logs one more time for references to teaching in a rural setting. During my first review, I did not see any comments that referred to challenges or benefits of teaching in a rural setting, but after reviewing the interview transcripts, I developed a better understanding of those experiences. I returned to the conference logs and highlighted comments that matched the codes associated with rural teaching that I identified in the interview transcripts. At this stage of data management, I had accumulated numerous preliminary codes referencing to Danielson's domains, Moir's phases, and andragogy. I had also created a document of descriptive statistics that summarized the frequency of references to the domains, phases, and types of andragogical learning.

During data manipulation, I "searched for, sorted, retrieved, and rearranged" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 222) the data. I combined references to emerging codes from Moir's phases for the spring and fall logs and constructed a fall and spring list for each of the five phases that included comments from all logs organized by emerging codes. In a similar fashion, I consolidated references to each emerging code for Danielson's domains from all conference logs in my data notebook. I stored the original conference logs, along with my preliminary notes, in a locked safe designated for this study. I stored the conference log spreadsheets and compilations of andragogical

references in a password protected file on my computer, so it was ready for further manipulation with the other data sources as I continued data analysis.

Performance rubrics. Some steps of the management of the rubrics were similar to the management of the conference logs. I received the rubrics, labeled with unique identifiers, from the mentors at the end of each semester at about the same time I received the conference logs. The rubrics included 10 descriptions of 10 elements from Danielson's framework. Each element included a scale with 12 descriptors (see Appendix C). I prepared the data by noting the placement of the mentor's checkmark for each element and replacing it with a corresponding numerical score, ranging from 1 to 12. I also recorded the same demographic information as for the conference log data. I noted the scores in the data notebook, and then I created a spreadsheet document that included scores in columns comparing fall and spring scores for each element for each teacher. If teachers entered more than one checkmark for an element, I did not enter any information on the spreadsheet. For the preliminary process of identification of codes, I simply noted the scores for the domains that included the elements on the rubric, until I manipulated the data with the other data sources. I stored the rubrics in the locked safe with the conference logs. I kept my notes in the data notebook in the locked safe, and I stored the rubric tables in a password-protected file on my computer.

Interviews. I contacted the consenting teachers by e-mail in early April 2015 and asked them to choose their preferred interview format. I scheduled 90-minute synchronous interviews outside of school time and recorded the interviews on a digital recording device and as a backup, on my phone. The interviews lasted about one hour,

but not longer than 90 minutes. I transferred the recordings to my computer so that I could pause and backtrack easily during transcription. Teachers who opted to participate in asynchronous interviews e-mailed their responses to me within an e-mail or as an attached document, and they granted permission for me to contact them with follow-up questions if needed.

I prepared the synchronous interview data by transcribing the recordings word for word in a document on my computer. I prepared the asynchronous interview responses by copying and pasting the responses to each question into a separate document. I removed all information that might have identified the teacher, school, or town, and, once again, recorded the demographic information and designated each interview transcript with a unique numerical identifier, which I later replaced with a pseudonym. In the next step of data preparation, I summarized answers to each question including salient quotes. Following the procedure approved by Walden University's IRB, I shared these summaries with the participants as member checks and with the NDTSS coordinator to review for breaches of confidentiality. I sent the summaries late October 2014 and asked the teachers to respond with any comments or revisions. I informed the participants that I would move forward with data analysis in 2 weeks unless they asked for more time to review and consider the summaries.

To identify the data, I began by reading each summary and noting preliminary codes from responses to each question. Next, I reviewed each interview transcript and used a color-coding system to highlight references to emerging codes. I reviewed each transcript multiple times so that I focused on one set of codes each time. By the time I

was finished I had reviewed each transcript at least five times to identify references to Danielson's (2007) domains, Moir's (1999) phases, rural teaching, participation in the mentoring program, and andragogical learning. I used the same codes and procedure I followed with the conference logs, and I copied related phrases in the data notebook to correspond with each domain and phase. I included additional codes as new information emerged.

In the first stages of data manipulation, I combined the answers from all interviews for each question and organized similar responses. I used the same strategy for the manipulation of the conference log data and consolidated references from all interview transcripts as they matched the emerging codes I identified for the logs. I stored my interview and data management notes in the data notebook in a locked safe. I locked the recording device, which included the original synchronous interview recordings, deleted the files from my phone, and stored the files on my computer in a password-protected file.

NDTSS survey data. I received the responses to the NDTSS survey responses as a spreadsheet that included NDTSS participant responses to questions on a Google survey. The only identifying information for each set of responses was school enrollment range. I deleted responses from teachers in schools with an enrollment greater than 600 students and prepared the remaining data by organizing the responses by the following school enrollment ranges: less than 50, 51-100, 101-200, 201-400, and 401-600. I created a document of descriptive statistics organized by school enrollment range that included frequencies of responses to each survey question in the form of a spreadsheet. To identify

the data, I recorded responses to questions related to Danielson's domains, participation in the NDTSS mentoring program, and plans for the next year's employment. I reviewed the open-ended responses and highlighted the codes that I had identified in the other data. I added new codes when necessary. I printed the spreadsheets and stored them in the data notebook, and I stored the digital files in a password-protected file on my computer. These data were ready for manipulation when I combined them with other data during analysis.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher plays a part in the validity and reliability of research in part because, "investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249). I shared my role of being a teacher in a small, rural school in this state with the participants. The school where I teach does not participate in the NDTSS, so I did not have a direct relationship with the participating first-year teachers. In the 32 years that I had been teaching, however, I had made acquaintances with many teachers in the state, and so I knew it was likely that I would know some of the mentors in the program. It was also possible that a few of the first-year teachers could have been high school students in my classes or school. It was highly unlikely that these past relationships would have influenced the collection or analysis of the data because the names and schools of participants were removed before or immediately after I received it. More importantly, however, in my role as a researcher and as a classroom teacher, I have no role of authority over teachers in other schools, and the participants voluntarily consented to

participate in the study and were informed they could leave the study at any time.

I did not have direct associations with the participants, but I did have a professional connection to the NDTSS. During the time of data collection, I was a member of the ESPB serving as the vice-chairperson. Although the NDTSS is associated with ESPB, according to North Dakota Century Code, the ESPB board does not evaluate the NDTSS or the program coordinator (North Dakota Century Codes 15.1-13-08, 15.1-18.2-05). I learned about the NDTSS because I was serving on the board, and I developed a relationship with the coordinator because of my interest in the program. My increased interest and personal experience with first-year teachers, who have not had a mentor, influenced my desire to learn about the NDTSS mentoring program. However, my position on the board did not provide a conflict of interest. I validated the lack of conflict of interest by submitting a letter of confirmation from the NDESPB executive director as part of my application to Walden University's IRB.

As I reflect on my role as researcher and my biases related to the research problem and setting, my role as a rural teacher was more influential than my role as a board member or veteran teacher with contacts across the state. I remember well the difficult first years of my teaching career, which included several well-meaning and helpful colleagues, but not a formal mentoring program. I have also experienced the frustration of wanting to guide a struggling first-year teacher, but not having a structure to do so constructively or consistently. My bias was not fueled by an interest to report favorable or negative findings. My bias stemmed from the belief that teaching in rural schools is important and the desire to improve the experiences for first-year teachers and

their students in the classroom. My bias provided the motivation to collect, analyze, and integrate the data with honesty and integrity, and to highlight the experiences of NDTSS participants so the program can be strengthened if necessary, implemented more widely if appropriate, and studied more deeply in the future.

Data Analysis

During the process of data management, I prepared the data, identified emerging codes, and began to manipulate the data from each source. In this way, I was able to follow the approved protocol that I had initially submitted to Walden University's IRB for the mixed-methods approach. After shifting to a case study design, I initiated the approved changes that allowed me to forego inferential analysis of the quantitative data, maintain descriptive statistical analysis in the form of frequency and type of responses, and emphasize the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts, conference logs, and NDTSS survey. As I reviewed the data, I used "hand analysis" (see Creswell, 2012, p. 240), rather than computer-based tools, to develop a deep understanding and appreciation of the data. However, I used word processing tools to organize and clarify the results of hand analysis.

During data management, I developed a case study database comprised of labeled files on my computer, my data notebook, and the raw data that I had already prepared and identified (Yin, 2013). I had identified codes referring to developing teaching effectiveness as compared to Danielson's framework, experiences of first-year teaching as compared to Moir's framework, and professional learning as compared to andragogical principles and constructivism. I had also identified codes related to teaching in a rural

setting. As I proceeded to data analysis and began to interpret the findings of the combined data, I was able to “attend to all evidence” (Yin, 2013, p. 132) and build a description of the experiences of the teachers in this case study.

Strategy

My strategy for analyzing the data was to use the propositions, outlined in the research design, as guides for organizing themes. The propositions influenced each step of the data collection process and, as a result, guided the “analytic priorities” (Yin, 2013, p. 136) of this study. I used constant comparison to organize the codes into themes that informed the propositions and ultimately led back to the two research questions about the experiences and developing effectiveness of the teachers (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constant comparison permitted me to compare and contrast the findings from all data sources and to expose patterns and categories that were common to the participants as well as those that were unique or surprising (see Lodico et al., 2010; Martin & McKinney, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Developing the codes, categories, and themes through constant comparison was an iterative process. I reviewed the data multiple times so that with each review I focused on one aspect of the study. Consequently, I read and analyzed the logs, transcripts, rubrics, and surveys through the separate lenses of first-year teaching, developing effectiveness, professional learning, mentoring, and teaching in a rural setting. I added, revised, and finally grouped the codes into increasingly broad categories that ultimately led to themes relating to one or more aspects of this study, (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process of revising and adding codes often revealed new insights that led me

back to a previously reviewed set of data to seek new information and deeper understanding. To ensure that I addressed all evidence, I created matrices in my data notebook to facilitate the identification of patterns among the codes and themes across all data sets (see Glesne, 2011; Yin, 2013). I also referred to the documents I created during data manipulation to review the frequency and types of references to Danielson's (2007) domains, Moir's (1999) phases, and andragogical learning. Reviewing these documents allowed me to set the context in which to describe the findings for each proposition. The propositions allowed me to maintain focus while reviewing multiple sources of data. In the next section, I will describe how I combined the findings from each subunit of data to address each proposition.

Proposition 1: The rural setting and teaching experiences. The first proposition related to the first research question, which inquired about the experiences of teaching in a rural school and proposed that teachers would indicate that a rural setting presented unique challenges and benefits to their teaching experiences. During data management, I reviewed the conference logs, interview transcripts, and NDTSS surveys to identify codes related to teaching in a rural setting. The interview transcripts revealed most information about teaching in a rural setting through answers to questions about the benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural school. After identifying codes, I assigned categories for groups of codes that related to each other. I also noted comments from open-ended questions in the NDTSS survey that fit the codes and categories for rural teaching. Finally, I combined the categories into themes to describe the experiences of teaching in a rural school while participating in the mentoring program. The NDTSS

survey results and interview transcripts provided information about the teachers' plans for second year teaching. Using both sets of data, I created an additional document as I tabulated the number of teachers who planned to teach in the same school the following year, as well as those with other plans. Although there is a variety of reasons a teacher may choose not to return to the same school, I included this information to determine whether a pattern might emerge regarding retention in rural settings.

Proposition 2: First-year teaching and the mentoring program. The second proposition related to the second research question, which asked about the experiences of participating in the mentoring program and proposed that participation in the program would mitigate some of the challenges of first-year teaching identified by Moir (2009). During data management, I reviewed the conference logs and noted references that were consistent with Moir's phases of first-year teaching. The mentors were not required to identify Moir's phases on the conference logs, but they did record the successes, challenges, and plans that the first-year teachers identified during each conference. I created a data matrix document (see Table 5), to tabulate references to each phase for each conference as a way to increase the reliability of this measure. The matrix was similar to Ferris and Ruff's (2011) matrix used to increase the reliability of their data coding procedure. I highlighted and then listed references to Moir's phases on the matrix by comparing the conference logs to the phase descriptions in the mentor manual (NDESPB, 2014). Ferris and Ruff only counted findings if they appeared three or more times on their matrix, but since the conference logs were abbreviated summaries; I counted two direct references to a phase as one finding.

Table 5

Data Matrix for Conference Logs

Conference log submission date	Progress from last conference	Feel good about	Challenging	Focus	Plans
Anticipation					
Survival					
Disillusionment					
Rejuvenation					
Reflection					

Note: Based on Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching and the NDTSS (2014) mentor handbook.

Although I had planned to identify the prevalent phase for each conference log, I found that there were times when the comments related to more than one phase in one conference log. Using Yin's (2013) caution that documents "should not be accepted as literal recordings of events" (p. 106), I acknowledged the possibility that the brief comments did not necessarily describe all of the circumstances surrounding the teacher during the conference. Therefore, I recorded all comments as a way to explore a broader range of experiences as documented by the mentors during the conferences. I constructed documents in the form of tables and graphs to show the frequencies of references to each phase for each semester to learn more about the types of discussion topics that took place from fall to spring.

As I learned more about the experiences of the teachers over their nine months of teaching, I began to consolidate codes into categories, which I used as I reviewed the emerging codes from the interview transcripts. Although I conducted the interviews at the end of the year, my questions referring to the beginning of the year, changes over the

course of the year, and experiences of the mentoring program aligned with Moir's (1999) descriptions of the phases of first-year teaching. Through constant comparison, I developed themes to describe the experiences of the first-year teachers in light of Moir's phases of first-year teaching. Because the second proposition also referred to the experiences of participating in the mentoring program, I reviewed the interview transcripts and the open-ended NDTSS survey questions to identify codes and finally themes that described working through the year with a mentor.

Proposition 3: Professional learning. Like the second proposition, the third proposition related to the second research question focused on the experiences of the teachers in the mentoring program. This proposition stated that participation in the mentoring program facilitated professional learning that was consistent with the theories of andragogy and constructivism. I reviewed the tables that I had constructed during data management, which included references to the six principles of adult learning (Knowles et al., 2015). I consolidated codes that I discerned from the documents I constructed, along with several answers to the NDTSS survey, into categories and then themes that related to professional learning.

I built the conceptual framework of this study on the theories of andragogy and constructivism. While these theories are not the same, there are “parallels between moderate views of constructivism and andragogy” (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 178). As I reviewed the comments that related to professional learning, I found that they all related to one of the core principles of andragogy. Therefore, I did not add additional codes that related specifically to constructivism, but the constructivist underpinnings of Danielson's

framework connected the findings to the conceptual framework of this study (Danielson, 2007).

Proposition 4: Developing teaching effectiveness. The fourth proposition stated that participants in the mentoring program were likely to explore or exhibit teaching practices consistent with the practices described by Danielson. This proposition related to the subquestion of the second research question regarding developing teaching effectiveness. I was able to use all four data sources to address this proposition. I followed the procedure I used when analyzing the data to explore the other propositions by starting with the conference logs and then moving on to the interview transcripts. I used the codes that emerged as I continued to analyze the spreadsheets that showed references to Danielson's domains and elements to develop categories and themes that described the developing effectiveness of the teachers in this study.

The documents I prepared that showed the frequencies and types of responses in the conference logs, performance rubrics, and NDTSS surveys allowed for content analysis and enhanced the qualitative data analysis from the logs and transcripts (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2013). I compared the frequency of references to each of Danielson's domains for fall and spring semester conference logs. Similarly, I compared spring and summer scores for the performance rubrics that related to teaching practices described in Danielson's framework and measured growth for each teacher as well as for the group. Finally, I used information from the NDTSS survey, because teachers identified the domain, which they felt was influenced most significantly by work with their mentors, as I refined the themes describing teaching effectiveness.

Accuracy and Credibility

From the first steps of designing this study to the reporting of the results, it was crucial for me to instill measures that built accuracy and credibility and provided assurances that the research was ethical, trustworthy, and rigorous (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2013). Yin (2013) stressed the importance of assuring the “accuracy with which a case study’s measures reflect the concepts being studied” (p. 237). Tracy (2013) explained that credibility is crucial in qualitative research because it allows the readers to “feel confident in using its data and findings to make decisions” (p. 235). During the process of data analysis, I used triangulation and member checking to increase the accuracy and credibility of my study (see Creswell, 2012). I also used multiple perspectives, and reflexivity to strengthen the credibility of my findings and increase the rigor of my study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2013).

Triangulation is the “process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection” (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). I used the interview transcripts and documents collected from participating first-year teachers, mentors, and the NDTSS office in the form of conference logs, performance rubrics, and survey results. I also used the documents I created to summarize the frequencies and types of responses recorded in the conference logs, surveys, and performance rubrics. While triangulation required the collection of data from different sources, it also allowed me to “compare and cross-check data” (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 244) during data analysis. By analyzing multiple data sources to address each proposition, I arrived at findings that were “supported by more than one source of evidence” (see Yin, 2013, p.

12). I invited the interview participants to complete a member check to determine if my summary was consistent with their intended responses and to ensure that my summaries were accurate (see Creswell, 2012). Following the protocol approved by Walden University's IRB, the NDTSS coordinator also reviewed my assignment of conference log entries to Moir's phases of first-year teaching to increase the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings of this study.

Tracy (2013) used the term "multivocality" (p. 237) to indicate the inclusion of different participants who bring varied perspectives to the study. Multivocality requires triangulation, but Tracy listed this component of building credibility separately. Tracy cautioned that the researcher must take into account the ways that different perspectives may influence the voices of participants in a study. For instance, it was necessary for me to allow the possibility that the viewpoints of the new teachers in the bounded case of my study differed from the viewpoints of their mentors. Being aware of my perceptions extended beyond maintaining impartiality when considering different perspectives to what Merriam and Tisdell (2016) referred to as "reflexivity" (p. 249). Although considering reflexivity was even more important when I was reporting the findings of the study, it was also necessary for me to reflect on and be aware of my biases, previous experiences, and ideas about first-year teaching and rural schools throughout the entire process of analysis. In this way, I could share how my "values and expectations influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study" (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249.)

Dealing with Discrepant Cases

Looking for discrepant events, which do not fit the propositions, is a way to increase the credibility of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tracy, 2013). Because the main purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the experiences of teachers in this study, it was critical for me to analyze the data and report the findings accurately and honestly. Therefore, if any discrepant events had arisen, I would have reported them within their context. In planning for how to deal with discrepant events, I relied heavily on the multiple layers of respect that I nurtured and maintained as I conducted this study. Lodico et al. (2010) emphasized that relationships establish the “trust and credibility,” which are “a necessary part of field relations” (p. 266). In my study, the balance of trust and credibility were essential. The NDTSS coordinator trusted me to handle the data from the NDTSS participants in a way that protected their anonymity. At the same time, I established and maintained credibility with the participants and the future readers of the analysis of my findings by ensuring that the results of my data analysis portrayed a representation of the participants through valid and reliable research practices. Although my study revealed no completely unexpected results, I did report responses from participants even when they were not completely favorable in their accounts.

Data Analysis Results

I organized the results of data analysis by presenting the findings as they related to each proposition. Table 4 shows the connections between the subunits of data and the propositions. In this section, I will describe the themes that emerged as I reviewed the

interview transcripts, conference logs, performance rubrics, and survey results. I will also explain the contextual information that unfolded during the development of the themes that relate to each proposition. Table 6 outlines the research questions, associated propositions, and themes that emerged during analysis. Table 7 describes the teachers by their pseudonym and teaching context. The experiences of these 11 teachers are woven through each depiction that enlightens the propositions that guided this study.

Table 6

Research Questions and Associated Propositions and Themes

RQ 1. How do first-year teachers describe their experiences of teaching in a rural school?	
Proposition 1	The teachers will indicate that their rural setting presents unique challenges and benefits to their teaching experiences.
Themes	Classroom instruction in the rural setting Relationships in the rural school setting
RQ 2. How do first-year teachers in rural schools describe their experiences in the mentoring program?	
Proposition 2	Participation in the mentoring program will level some of the expected challenges identified within Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching.
Themes	Survival Disillusionment Rejuvenation
Proposition 3	Participation in the mentoring program will facilitate professional learning that is consistent with the theory of andragogy.
Themes	Relevance Motivation
Subquestion. What can be understood about the developing effectiveness of teachers in rural schools who participate in the NDTSS mentoring program?	
Proposition 4	First-year teachers in the mentoring program will show evidence that they are developing and discussing practices that are consistent with effective teaching as described by Danielson's (2007) framework for effective teaching.
Themes	Planning and preparation Classroom environment Instruction Professional responsibilities

Note. Themes from Proposition 2 were based on Moir's (1999) phases of first-year teaching. Themes from Proposition 4 were named according to Danielson's (2007) domains in her framework for teaching.

Table 7

List of Interview Participants by Pseudonym

Pseudonym	Grade Level	School Enrollment Range
Claire	Combined levels	Less than 200 students
Drew	One level	Less than 200 students
John	Combined levels	Less than 200 students
Mark	Combined levels	Less than 200 students
Rose	One level	Less than 200 students
Beth	Combined levels	201-400 students
Hope	Combined levels	200-400 students
Jill	One level	200-400 students
Dawn	One level	200-400 students
Brynn	Combined levels	400-600 students
Kate	Combined levels	400-600 students

Note: Within the grade level column, “one level” indicates that the teacher was assigned to teach one level within grades K-6, 7-8, or 9-12. “Combined levels” indicates that the teacher was assigned to teach more than one of the above levels.

Proposition 1: The Experiences of Teaching in a Rural School

I wrote the first proposition in response to the first research question inquiring about the experiences of teaching in a rural school to suggest that the teachers in this study would indicate that their rural settings presented unique challenges and benefits to their teaching experiences. I focused on previous rural school experiences based on Goodpaster et al.’s (2012) implication that teacher retention in rural schools might be higher among teachers who had attended rural schools. Following the example of Smeaton and Waters (2013), who emphasized that the six teachers in their study planned to return to the same rural schools for their second year was a “significant success” (p. 84), I also inquired about the teachers’ plans for the next school year. A review of the participants’ familiarity with rural schools and plans for the next school year provided the context to expound on the themes of classroom instruction and relationships.

Setting the context: Rural school experiences and plans. Of the 11 teachers who participated in an interview, seven had attended a rural school as a student. Of those seven, four said that they planned, and even preferred to teach in a rural school in the coming years. Rose said, “I hope to teach in the same school for many years.” Two teachers indicated that they would stay in their current setting for a year or more, but they wanted to explore the option of moving to a larger district where resources were more abundant. Of the four teachers who did not attend a rural school as a student, none seemed compelled to leave their current teaching position. Beth explained that even if she left the state, she would seek rural employment. She said, “I have no desire to teach in a big school. Even if I ended up in a bigger city, I would probably seek employment in a small or rural school.” Kate said she liked teaching in a smaller setting, but planned to move to a larger district for personal reasons. Claire and John said they were not opposed to staying in a rural school, but were open to the possibility of teaching in a larger district in the future. In terms of staying in North Dakota, none of the interview participants shared a strong desire to leave the state. After her first year, Jill said, “I strongly believe that North Dakota has one of the very best educational systems, and the support I have been given here is wonderful.” Mark said, “I don’t see any reason why I’d need to leave North Dakota. I grew up here. My family is here.” Indeed, family seemed to influence some of the teachers as they thought about staying in the state. While two teachers said they were open to the possibility of leaving depending on their family situations, four mentioned family as a reason for staying in the state.

My review of the NDTSS survey responses provided more information about

teachers' plans for their second year of teaching. Of the 154 teachers who responded to the survey, about 80% said they planned to teach at the same school in their second year. About 10% planned to teach in a different school in North Dakota, and 3% planned to teach in a different state. Teachers in schools with a student enrollment of 400 or more were slightly more likely to indicate they planned to return to the same school for their second year of teaching compared to teachers in smaller schools. The findings alluded to the idea that the decision to stay in a rural teaching position or move to a larger setting was likely influenced by a variety of interacting factors (see Huysman, 2008). The findings also showed that like the interview participants, most planned to stay in the state at least in the near future.

Two themes related to teaching in a rural setting emerged as I reviewed the interview transcripts. The first theme focused on instruction within a rural school. The second theme focused on relationships in a rural setting. I built these themes from codes that I identified as I reviewed the interview transcripts, conference logs, and open-ended answers to the NDTSS survey. I focused on responses to interview questions about the teachers' previous exposure to rural schools, the benefits, and challenges of teaching in a rural school, and explanations about whether or not they planned to return to teach in the same school or North Dakota for their second year of teaching. My review of the conference logs and NDTSS survey responses provided corroboration of the findings related to teaching in a rural school and painted a picture of the experiences of these teachers in their settings.

Classroom instruction in the rural setting. The theme of classroom instruction

emerged as I analyzed teachers' descriptions of how their varied experiences had affected their instructional practices in positive and negative ways. Consistent with other research, it was common for teachers to identify pros and cons for a single factor related to teaching in a rural setting (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Huysman, 2008; Preston, 2012). Although the interview participants emphasized instructional benefits that focused on knowing the students, having freedom in planning, and working with a supportive staff, they also identified challenges that included, resistance to change and a heavy workload. The following subthemes emerged as tensions that existed in the classroom experiences of the first-year teachers in this study.

Autonomy and isolation. My review of the interview transcripts highlighted the tension between autonomy and isolation. Similar to findings by Player (2015), three teachers specified that autonomy was a benefit of teaching in a small school. Beth explained the two sides of autonomy when she said, "I have total freedom and responsibility for all of my students' success and failure from the time they begin seventh grade until they graduate. That is a lot for one person to handle." Brynn also mentioned the freedom that can come with teaching in a smaller setting, and Mark acknowledged that planning for many different lessons each day could "be stressful at times." However, both Brynn and Mark said they liked the flexibility that came with being the only teacher in their respective content areas.

Professional isolation can refer to the difficulty in accessing professional development as well as being the only teacher assigned to a particular grade level or content area (Hellsten et al., 2011). Jill noted that one of the challenges of teaching in her

setting was traveling to different parts of the state to attend workshops, and Hope noted that the distances from competitions and potential field trip sites were an aspect of rural teaching that could put students at a “disadvantage.” Three teachers specified having limited contact with someone teaching a similar subject or grade. Kate and Claire mentioned that being the only teacher in their content area or grade level was a challenge. John, who was the only teacher in his content area at his school said, “I’m a team player, so for me, that was an obstacle.” John continued, however, that his mentor did provide supports and access to content-specific resources and helped him deal with the isolation he experienced. Of the 11 interview participants, only three had mentors with an entirely different teaching assignment in the content area and grade level. Jill, who shared a similar teaching assignment with her mentor, noted the similarities as a strength of participating in the mentoring program, while Hope mentioned that differences in teaching assignments made it difficult to get content-specific feedback regarding her instruction.

Workload and involvement. Another tension that emerged in the findings showed that there was a tenuous balance between an overwhelming workload and the opportunity to get involved in many activities. Five teachers identified “additional duties” as a challenge of teaching in small schools. However, Brynn explained that for teachers and students, the positive experiences of trying new things and getting involved was less likely to occur in a larger school. During the interviews, four teachers specified that their workload was a challenge of their teaching assignment. Of the nine interview participants who taught Grades 7-12, five had four or more different preparations in their teaching

assignments. Beth specified a heavy workload as a challenge of her teaching situation, and she said, “Six preparations require much time to plan, prepare, teach, and correct.” Mark also noted, “I teach a lot of different grades, so having that many different lessons planned for each day can be stressful.” Even teaching at a single grade level, Rose remembered the difficulty of the first months stating, “there was so much to do all the time, and I never felt like I was going to catch up.” These findings were consistent with the findings of my literature review, which showed that teachers in rural settings often have multiple preparations to teach each day that varies from different grade levels to different sections of similar content, to completely different content areas (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2011).

The conference logs provided a multi-faceted view of the experiences of six teachers’ workloads. Like a kaleidoscope that shows arrangements of components that appear slightly different to each viewer, the conference logs provided the mentors’ summaries of the challenges, successes, and plans that provided topics for discussion. Although each mentor provided different levels of detail, each set of logs provided glimpses into the workloads of the new teachers as evidenced by the identified challenges, plans, and successes for each conversation. Comments ranging from preparation for substitute teachers, to planning and grading, to professional development obligations provided evidence of challenges dealing with a heavy workload.

There was no way to differentiate whether the comments related specifically to workload resulted from teaching in small, rural schools or the experiences of first-year teaching. Nonetheless, a review of the conference log entries revealed that some teachers

felt overwhelmed with the workload of teaching multiple grade levels and preparations while often balancing extracurricular responsibilities. It is important to note that some of the comments were positive and noted accomplishments and other successes.

Of the six sets of conference logs, the only topic related to workload that was recorded more than three times by all teachers was about planning lessons, units, or curriculum. In a review of the 161 conference logs, I noted 31 references, to planning. Of those 31 references, 12 were positive. It was interesting to note that different teachers seemed to struggle consistently with different aspects of their workload. For example, one set of conference logs included nine references to frustrations related to extracurricular responsibilities during 28 conferences. The same teacher mentioned feeling good about extracurricular obligations twice in the spring. Another teacher mentioned the challenges of grading during four of 25 conferences. Comments that suggested feeling overwhelmed with workloads included, “feeling like have to rush,” “run down from teaching and life,” “tired of testing,” and “overwhelmed with number of things to do before end of the year.” On a more positive note, there were comments such as, “don’t feel like in survival mode,” “feels like some things are working,” “planning for the week has been exciting.” These comments suggested that some teachers were learning to cope with the workload or they were able to see the benefits of their work.

Tradition and change. The interview transcripts included several references to the tension between traditions and change. While traditions presented connections between the school and community that enriched and challenged the experiences of the first-year teachers, resistance to changes provided some struggles. Kate and John

described the strong ties between the schools where they taught and the parents and staff who had graduated from the same school. Kate noted strong parental support in academics and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, John experienced push back when his teaching styles were perceived as different from that which parents were accustomed. Two teachers also mentioned challenges associated with bringing new ideas to a veteran staff. Dawn said that sometimes it felt like the new teachers were “rocking the boat a bit” for veteran teachers.

Resistance to change was not a phenomenon that I focused on in my proposal or expected in my results. In this study, three teachers identified resistance to change as a challenge of teaching in a rural setting, and others mentioned similar struggles in response to other interview questions. Although it manifested itself differently for each of the teachers, dealing with resistance to change seemed to influence their experiences within the school and or classroom. As John and Brynn reviewed their personal experiences and the experiences of their first-year acquaintances, they noted that resistance to change could result from doing things differently than a previous teacher. John explained that this could be unsettling to both parents and students. He said that feedback from his mentor validated that the changes were appropriate. Dawn also mentioned that as a new teacher it seemed that new ideas were not initially welcome among some of the veteran staff, but other staff members were receptive and supportive of her ideas. Mark identified his mentor as a source of support because his mentor had “a really good handle on what to expect in a small school,” and Kate credited her mentor with helping to understand the school culture.

Class size and resources. Small class size and limited resources emerged as a final tension related to classroom teaching in rural schools. Six teachers mentioned small class sizes as another benefit of teaching in small schools stressing the opportunities of getting to know the students, being able to work with them individually, talk with them daily, and provide individualized support. This knowledge of students extended to an understanding of what they were learning from one year to the next, which increased the continuity of instruction. Beth, who taught multiple grade levels said, “I have the advantage of knowing exactly what my students learned this year,” and noted that this knowledge made it easier to plan for the following year of instruction. Hope, who also taught multiple levels of the same content, said she liked knowing she could watch the students grow as they advanced from one grade to the next. Knowledge of students and instruction was also mentioned in a conference log when one teacher acknowledged that it would take a few years to build the program, but knowing “where students are” was a reason to look forward to the next year of teaching.

The benefits of small class sizes seemed to overshadow the drawbacks of limited resources. However, three teachers referred to limited resources as a challenge of teaching in a small school. Jill qualified that although she did not believe that the lack of resources was a serious detriment to learning, she felt it did limit possibilities for her students. When Mark described his ideal teaching position, he identified a larger district with more resources, and Dawn included “more technology” in her description of an ideal teaching position.

Relationships in the rural school setting. The theme of relationships within the rural setting emerged as I reviewed the interview transcripts. These relationships involved the first-year teachers and the students, teachers, parents, and other community members within the scope of teaching in a rural school. In this section, I will not delve into the relationship with the mentor except for the ways that relationship improved or impeded other relationships within the rural setting. There were benefits and drawbacks to the relationships the participants mentioned during the interviews and alluded to in the conference logs. Kate summarized this when she said, “Everybody knows everybody. There are pros and cons to this.” Kate added that she was surprised that there were drawbacks to this familiarity. Participants in this study described their relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. As I analyzed the data, distinctions of the relationships within the rural setting emerged as three separate subthemes.

Relationships with students. Of the interview participants, seven alluded to relationships with students as a positive aspect of teaching in a rural setting. Hope said that in her small school, she could build an understanding of her students’ interests and struggles. Hope also said, “I have loved learning how to connect with students” as one of the reasons she planned to stay in the teaching profession. Jill noted that she knew all of the students in the school, not just in her classroom. Brynn also mentioned creating relationships “with each of the kids.” She speculated, “it might be difficult to have close relationships with all the students in a larger school setting.” Claire said she felt the small school setting afforded more opportunities to help all students.

Drew, shared plans to stay in a small school in part because he “liked the ability

to build relationships and work individually with students.” However, he also noted a potential challenge of building relationships with students in the community, because they sometimes seemed to think they could “get away with more” in the classroom. Similarly, Kate explained that while her students often worked well together, since they knew each other so well, they were more likely to irritate each other as well. John also hinted at similar challenges when he described his ideal teaching setting as one where students would “treat each other with kindness.” Among the few conference log entries that provided a glimpse into the conversations about relationships with students, comments included frustrations with relationships with students followed by improvements and positive interactions between the same teacher and students that were observed by the mentor.

Relationships with teachers. References to relationships with other teachers hinted at benefits as well as a few challenges of the teaching experiences for the participants in this study. Dawn said that relationships with teachers was an advantage of teaching in a rural school because she was able to get to know them better despite the challenges of different opinions among staff members. When describing her ideal teaching situation, Dawn declared she would want to teach with the same supportive staff and administration. Rose mentioned the benefits of working with a small staff stating that she felt “comfortable asking for help.” Drew explained that all of the teachers in his school were willing to provide help. My review of the conference logs provided a few suggestions that there were, on occasion, struggles for some first-year teachers as they worked with other staff members. References to challenges of working with support staff,

frustrations with a colleague, and promoting professional relationships appeared in less than a dozen comments scattered among the conference logs. Among those same comments were some positive references showing improvement in relationships, and the sharing of ideas with other teachers.

Relationships with parents and community members. Relationships that extended beyond the classroom walls included opportunities to work with parents and the community. Kate credited “more parental involvement” as a benefit of rural teaching that allowed her to know more about her students and their families. She continued that over the course of the school year, she learned to understand the relationships between her students and realized that sometimes her students “needed space.” Brynn referred to her history as a student in a rural school as the reason her teaching experience was not a “culture shock.” She explained that she understood the importance of fitting in and said, “I knew how I handled things, in the beginning, was going to decide whether I had a good, positive experience.” Kate added that she was aware that for teachers and students, what happened in the community might extend into the classroom. Rose credited the comfortable feel of the rural setting as one reason she wanted to stay.

While most participants in my study emphasized the positive aspects of relationships in the community, several teachers also referred to issues related to loss of anonymity when describing their experiences. One teacher noted that not living in the same community as the school provided a bit more anonymity and distance between professional and personal life. Another teacher who had been a student in a large district said that the lack of anonymity was very different from her previous experience, while a

third interview participant mentioned the lack of anonymity as a contributing reason for not returning to the rural setting.

In addition to the specific connections between the rural setting and first-year teaching experiences, the teachers also mentioned more abstract aspects of their experiences that seem to cumulate in the “feel” of teaching in a rural setting. Both Rose and Dawn said they felt “comfortable in the small rural setting,” and John mentioned the relaxed culture as a benefit of teaching in his locale. Kate also mentioned the beauty of her rural setting as an advantage to her experience. In a working paper focused on rural teachers and retention, Miller (2012) said that “rural schools are not homogeneous” (p. 2), and Sharplin, O’Neill, and Chapman (2011) concluded that new teachers respond to the challenges of their rural settings in a variety of ways. These findings rang true as I analyzed the data gathered from the teachers in this study.

The results of data analysis supported the first proposition and showed that the participants indicated connections between some of their experiences and their rural settings. Consistent with the fact that teaching is a complex undertaking, was the revelation that for the teachers in this study, teaching in a rural school was both challenging and rewarding. The results of data analysis revealed that teachers experienced pros and cons in different ways. Even so, there were common experiences regarding the challenges of workload, isolation, and resistance to change and benefits of relationships and autonomy that can help to increase the understanding of new teachers in rural schools.

Proposition 2: Experiences in the Mentoring Program

I wrote the second proposition to suggest that involvement in the mentoring program would level some of the challenges of first-year teaching in response to the second research question. In the second research question, I asked how the NDTSS participants described their experiences in the mentoring program. I used Moir's (1999) descriptions of the phases of first-year teaching as guides to identify the challenges that often accompany the first year of teaching. This case study design did not include a point of comparison between teachers who participated in a mentoring program and those who did not. Nonetheless, my review of the data showed that the teachers in this study worked through the phases of first-year teaching, as identified by Moir, with their mentors. In particular, the teachers and their mentors seemed to focus on the phases of disillusionment, survival, and rejuvenation, which were the themes that emerged to inform the third proposition. Analysis of the conference logs, which documented the conversations between the first-year teachers and mentors during the mentoring conferences, related to the phases of first-year teaching and helped to set the context to better understand the developing relationships between the mentors and first-year teachers.

Setting the Context: Experiencing the phases of first-year teaching. Even though the mentors recorded the details of each conference log with varying detail, a count of references to each phase provided insight into the experiences of the teachers in this study. Following the protocol outlined in the data analysis section, I counted a reference to a phase if the mentor recorded two related comments in one log. Therefore, a

reference to a phase indicated that there were two comments from the teacher that related to one phase. For example, one mentor recorded frustrations related to working towards “finishing units,” and “preparing for semester tests,” as challenges identified by the new teacher. I counted this as one reference to the survival phase. On the other hand, the same teacher mentioned being excited about “developing relationships with students and staff.” Because there was only one such comment on the log, I did not include it as a reference to the anticipation phase.

The matrix I used to record references to each phase for each conference log showed 63 references to Moir’s phases in the fall and 53 references in the spring. There were more references to anticipation in the fall than in the spring, which is consistent with Moir’s (1999) explanation that anticipation takes place before and during the first few weeks of teaching. There were over twice as many references to survival in the fall than in the spring and nearly twice as many references to rejuvenation in the spring compared to the fall. There were very few comments related to reflection in either semester.

My analysis of the conference logs, interview transcripts, and NDTSS open-ended survey responses provided a deeper look at the participants’ journeys through the first year of teaching with a mentor. The themes of survival, disillusionment, and rejuvenation provided insight into the experiences of the teachers in this study. In the next section, I will describe how the findings of data analysis revealed these three themes, which I named after Moir’s (1999) phases.

Survival. Moir (1999) explained that the survival phase is expected during the

first month of teaching when first-year teachers are “bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated” (p. 20). Also, teachers are working extra hours to develop lesson plans and build an understanding of the many responsibilities that fill each day (Moir, 1999). Comments recorded on the conference logs that related to this phase were more frequent in the early fall and included references to personal health, getting ready for substitute teachers, and the time-consuming nature of correcting, classroom management, and lesson planning. The list below includes a sample of comments that indicate the teachers might have been in the survival phase early in the year.

- “Feel like having to rush through lesson.”
- “Feeling overwhelmed about everything involved in – coaching, teaching, college courses, and life.”
- “Getting overwhelmed with additional activities to do as directed by administration”
- “Feels overwhelmed with the testing information and how to deal with it”
- “We discussed the challenges of staying aware of meeting times, places, etc.
- Possible solutions were also discussed.”

The role of the mentor also came through in some of the conference logs. A review of August and September logs showed examples of challenges for the new teachers and support by the mentors. For example, one mentor noted the teacher’s next steps were to set up the computer grading system along with the mentor’s next steps to check the grading scale to ensure that it was accurate. The same set of logs contained

several references to standardized testing, and the mentor's next step to provide instructions on how to help the teacher access students' results. Another mentor recorded several comments related to the challenges of pacing lessons along with the mentor's first steps of observing the teacher and providing feedback on designing coherent instruction. As a final example, a mentor provided suggestions regarding communication with a coworker about challenges the new teacher was facing.

My review of the interview transcripts also provided glimpses into the experiences of the teachers as they started their teaching career. Comments related to survival centered on spending many evening and weekend hours planning, keeping up with extracurricular activities, and learning how to maneuver routines and requirements. These concerns seemed to fuel self-doubt as the teachers questioned whether they were on the right track in their teaching. Dawn referred to "those times during that first semester where you feel like nothing is going right and you just have no idea of what's going on." She said that having a mentor helped to process the questions and concerns. Rose described staying at school until 7:30 in the evening to prepare for the next day and said planning for "a whole week was too much." Rose also described the challenges of organizing her room and dealing with a shortage of supplies. She said that she "borrowed a lot" from her mentor and frequently talked with her mentor to receive advice and feedback.

The responses to the open-ended questions of the NDTSS survey emphasized two perspectives on the survival phase of first-year teaching. In addition to comments about the ways that involvement in the mentoring program eased the passage through this phase

of teaching, others mentioned the requirements of the mentoring programs. While some referred to these experiences as additional stressors, others highlighted the requirements as strengths of the program. I looked for comments that referred to time constraints and to being overwhelmed and busy. Of the 154 comments, 45 related to the survival phase, and of those, eight focused exclusively on the frustrations of keeping up with the conferences and observations required by the mentoring program that seemed to add to already feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities of first year teaching. Ten teachers mentioned the benefits of the mentoring program while also alluding that the time requirements were stressful or in some way, burdensome. On the other hand, six teachers acknowledged that the time requirements were necessary to yield the benefits that they realized through the program. Fisher (2012) suggested possible merits to such requirements saying, "Mentoring involves deadlines, forms, and protocols because accountability is an important part of the success of teaching" (p. 14). In total, 27 teachers provided comments indicating that their participation in the program helped them survive the first year of teaching. Seven teachers used the words "always available" when describing their mentors. Others mentioned the benefit of having someone to go to without feeling that they were a burden, receiving resources, and appreciating that the mentors worked around the busy schedules of both the mentor and new teachers.

In addition to showing that the first-year teachers in this study did experience the survival phase of teaching, my review of the data also showed that not all mentor-teacher relationships were the same. Kahrs and Wells (2012) noted the tendency of mentor-new teacher interactions to diminish over time. The NDTSS program is designed to maintain

interactions over the year with required observations and conferences for both semesters. Even so, there were a few instances when the mentor was not consistently available or when the requirements of conferencing and observing other teachers seemed focused on compliance more than working through the survival phase of teaching. Overall, however, in the words of Drew, involvement in the NDTSS program appeared to reduce some of the “pressure” of first-year teaching and “help the teacher focus on teaching.” For the teachers in this case study, the mentoring program appeared to provide support. This was especially true when the first-year teacher felt that the mentor was consistently present to listen, provide constructive feedback, offer encouragement, and share resources.

Disillusionment. The disillusionment phase follows the survival phase and accompanies new experiences such as evaluations and parent-teacher conferences as well as ongoing challenges with classroom management (Moir, 1999). Moir (1999) said that this is a time when “teachers begin questioning both their commitment and competence” (p. 21). Conference log references to disillusionment appeared quite consistently in both semesters, which varies from Moir’s description of this phase dominating the first semester of teaching. Comments from the conference logs that related to this phase included references to classroom management; student motivation; engagement; dealing with standardized testing; and interactions with administration, paraprofessionals, and parents. The list below includes a sample of comments early in the year that indicates the teachers might have been in the disillusionment phase.

- “Kids don’t take me seriously all the time.”
- “Class project is not going well.”

- “Extracurricular participants are not doing their jobs.”
- “Everyone working at different pace.”
- “Run down and tired due to teaching and all extra life things.”
- “Students get the study guide and still fail the test.”
- “Tests are taking away from instructional time.”
- “How to move students forward when they are not ready?”

Although the conference log references that reflected disillusionment appeared throughout the year, my review of the interview transcripts showed that disillusionment was more common in the fall. When reflecting on the beginning of the school year, Rose said, “My first months of teaching were awful!” She explained that she struggled with routine and procedures and how strict to be with her students. As Moir (1999) explained, the realization of the amount of time required to make things work in the classroom adds to the disillusionment phase. Beth mentioned the “indescribable amounts of time” that she spent preparing and grading work. John said, “Even if it is a minor change in a classroom rule, if you want to change something, that takes forever.” These comments indicated that experiences related to change seemed to intersect with the theme of disillusionment for some teachers.

A few teachers seemed surprised to be dealing with disillusionment. When describing teaching in a small, rural school, Kate said, “I thought, there’s no way there could be any cons, but there definitely are.” Kate mentioned that she was dealing with disillusionment at the end of the year more than she did at the beginning of the year. Both she and Brynn described struggles with extracurricular events, nice weather, impending

graduation, and end of the semester tests that seemed to decrease student engagement. Brynn also expressed the self-doubt that Moir includes in this phase by explaining that although she prepared extensively, she did not always feel qualified.

Of the 154 responses to the NDTSS survey, nine related to disillusionment. One teacher explained that the mentor “was there” to help deal with problems ranging from phone calls to parents to classroom management, to celebrate successes, and to provide encouragement through the year. The three components in the preceding response highlight the steps of the conference protocol – identifying challenges, successes, and planning for the next weeks. Six other teachers mentioned that their mentors provided encouragement and perspective that included reminders of what was going well even when the teachers were more focused on the struggles they were facing. Two teachers indicated that more support and interest from their mentors would have been helpful to them.

My analysis of the interview transcripts verified that the teachers in the case study dealt with disillusionment at one point or another through their first year. Comments from the interview transcripts showed that one way that the mentoring program helped the teachers through this phase was by providing encouragement and feedback. Claire said that participation in the mentoring program was beneficial to her because her mentor offered encouragement with improvement. Hope said, “If I didn’t have my mentor sit down and discuss it all with me, I would have had no clue.” In addition, discussions with mentors seemed to help teachers deal with factors that can contribute to disillusionment by improving classroom management, and self-confidence (see Moir, 1999).

Rejuvenation. According to Moir (1999), rejuvenation typically begins in January. This phase often follows the increased rest and relaxation that comes with a mid-year break, and teachers return to school with growing confidence, improved skills, and a feeling of accomplishment that they are getting through their first year (Moir, 1999). In Moir's description, rejuvenation has many "ups and downs" (p. 23) through the end of the school year. I only included references to rejuvenation that dealt with the "slow improvement in the new teacher's attitude toward teaching" (p. 22) to avoid overlapping references to disillusionment and survival. I recorded the struggles, which Moir proposed teachers experience during this phase as references to disillusionment or survival.

References to rejuvenation in the conference logs alluded to improvements in classroom management, lesson delivery, and the realization that things were going better overall. Most of the fall references occurred later in the semester. The list below includes some comments from the spring semester conference logs that related to rejuvenation:

- "Happy with the student involvement."
- "Loves what she is doing with her classes."
- "Lessons are going well and seem to be getting easier."
- "Busy, but good."
- "The year is three quarters done, and so much has happened!"
- "Feel good about ending semester and content taught."
- "Using lessons from observation"
- "Students who were unmotivated are getting interested."

- “Parent-teacher conferences feel organized.”
- “Feel good about the routine compared to beginning of year.”

The interviews took place in April and May of the teachers’ first year, and the teachers shared comments that related to rejuvenation. References related to this phase included comments about growing confidence, improved lessons and classroom management, excitement for the second year of teaching, and satisfaction with the progress made during the first year. Claire explained that when she followed her mentor’s advice and added more detail to her lesson plans, her lessons improved. Claire also mentioned that her mentor validated the improvements she made acknowledging the value of positive feedback that accompanied her conferences with the mentor. Rose explained that compared to the beginning of the year, she felt more self-confident in May. She continued that the required observations of teachers in tandem with regular conversations with her mentor helped her grow in confidence and improve classroom management and routines. Rose said, “I’m not sure what changes I would have made if I weren’t able to watch and talk to my mentor.” Mark also credited observations of other teachers with his ability to improve the way he assessed students in his class. Brynn said that by April, she did not have to spend her entire weekends planning for the coming week.

There were only two clear references to rejuvenation in the NDTSS survey responses. One teacher wrote in detail about the benefits of participating in the optional class offered for credit to the new teachers. The teacher explained that the class provided the required framework that pushed her to try new things and report on the results.

Another teacher expressed support for the program by sharing the realization that some struggles were part of the process and that working with a mentor provided the tools and understanding to deal with problems that appeared.

Moir (1999) explained that the rejuvenation phase does include struggles, doubts, and concerns, but it also is a time when teachers view their experiences from a different perspective that allows them to see their progress as well as those struggles. By taking a step back when reviewing the data, this phase comes into focus more clearly. The conference log references that reflected disillusionment and survival in the spring months can be viewed as steps along the journey of rejuvenation, and the analysis of the interview transcripts showed that the teachers anticipated that their second year would be better.

Proposition 2 suggested that participation in the mentoring program would level the challenges of first-year teaching. Moir's description of the phases of first-year teaching is accompanied by a diagram that shows the hills and valleys of the experiences a first-year teacher is likely to encounter from the beginning to the end of the school year. Overall, my analysis of the data showed that for the teachers in this case study, participation in the mentoring program seemed to smooth the valleys of survival and disillusionment while helping the teachers appreciate the rejuvenation phase. Some responses from the NDTSS survey indicated this was not the case for every single participant. Those responses mostly signified struggles with keeping up with the program's requirements or wishes for more or different interactions with the mentor.

A prompt on the NDTSS survey asked teachers to rate how valuable participation

in the mentoring program had been. Of the teachers employed in schools with fewer than 600 students who responded to this prompt, 78% said they strongly agreed or agreed that participation was valuable, and 7% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same comment. During the interviews, the teachers in the bounded case all said that they would advise other new teachers to participate in the mentoring program. These findings related to this proposition because many of the responses to the question were most focused on the teachers' experiences during their first year. Brynn clarified that she would recommend the program "100 times over" provided the teacher be paired with a strong and supportive mentor. Beth and Dawn, on the other hand, explained that even if the relationship with the mentor was not perfect, they would still recommend participation because of the benefits they received through their year.

Similar to Moir et al.'s (2009) findings, my analysis of the data supported the idea the mentoring relationship is indeed important. During the interviews, teachers who described a strong and positive relationship with their mentors also indicated that the program was beneficial to their first-year experience. Interestingly, even those few who mentioned they did not have a strong relationship with their mentor recommended participation in the program. For the majority of participants in this study, involvement in the mentoring program appeared to level some of the challenges of first-year teaching. The comments provided by interview participants and survey respondents showed that consistency, constructive feedback, and support provided by caring and interested mentors eased those time when the teachers were struggling.

Proposition 3: Experiences as Andragogical Learners

I wrote the third proposition to suggest that participation in the NDTSS program would facilitate andragogical professional learning. This proposition was significant to the study because it helped me answer the second research question regarding the experiences of NDTSS participants who were teaching in rural schools. Proposition 3 also reflected the andragogical and constructivist conceptual framework of this study. To address this proposition, I reviewed the data through the lens of the six principles of andragogical learning proposed by Knowles et al. (2015). Those six principles focus on the adult learner and his or her need to know, self-concept, prior experience, readiness, motivation to learn, and orientation to learning (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 6). An analysis of the interview transcripts and conference logs showed references to all six principles. I consolidated the findings into the two themes of relevance and motivation. To set the context for this proposition, I will explain what the data revealed about the influence of participation in the NDTSS program regarding professional learning experiences.

Setting the context: Mentoring and perceived value of professional learning. I analyzed portions of the NDTSS survey and performance rubrics to increase understanding of the perceptions related to the professional learning experiences of the participants during the mentoring program. The NDTSS survey included a list of the following program components: one-on-one conferences with mentors, classroom observations and feedback from the mentor, observation and discussion of a video recording of the first-year teacher, and classroom observations of other teachers. Through the survey, the teachers were asked to select the three components they found most

valuable. They were also asked to select any components they did not find valuable or to indicate that all were valuable to them. Half of the respondents selected the response that all components were valuable. Most teachers selected three components they found valuable, and a third of the teachers selected one component they did not find valuable. An additional question asked, “Overall, how valuable was your participation in the NDTSS mentor program?” followed by a scale of 5 to 1 with five meaning “very valuable” and one meaning “not at all valuable.” While the ends of the scale were defined, it was unclear how teachers interpreted the midpoints on the scale. Seventy percent of the rural respondents selected a 4 or 5 on the scale. About 8% selected a rating of 2, and less than 1% selected the lowest rating.

Responses to the two open-ended prompts on the survey provided further insight into these results. The prompts invited teachers to share comments with their mentor or with the NDTSS program. Consistent with previous findings indicating that the participants often felt overwhelmed and busy, some respondents expressed frustration with time spent outside of the classroom to meet the NDTSS requirements for meetings and observations. Most of the respondents said that the amount of information provided by the NDTSS program was sufficient.

A look at the perceptions regarding the hours required for observations showed that although more than half found the requirements to be sufficient, nearly a third found them to be too much. These results corresponded with the findings of my analysis of the survey’s open-ended questions. Of the 23 comments related specifically to working with the mentors and professional learning, six reported frustrations with time commitments

and a feeling that the meetings were redundant, and two suggested a lack of rapport with their mentor. On the other hand, 17 comments related to the support and access to helpful information required to navigate through the first year of teaching with topics that included changing classroom climate, using new resources, developing routines, dealing with the community, analyzing test results, improving instructional strategies, implementing technology, and dealing with difficult students. Similarly, of the nine teachers who mentioned the required 6 hours per semester to observe other teachers, five referred to the requirement as a burden in terms of time spent away from the classroom. In contrast, one teacher expressed a desire for more observations, and four highlighted watching teachers within their content area or grade level as a strong benefit of the program. Comments related to the optional online course reflected a similar diversity of responses related to the value of the experience. While several teachers mentioned that the requirements were “doable” or “just right,” others related that they were “too much,” and while some teachers touted the relevance of the assignments as a way to be forced to focus on classroom instructions, others said that it felt like busy work.

My analysis of the perceived value of the NDTSS components revealed that overall, the NDTSS participants valued meeting with their mentors and completing the other components of the program. Several responses to the open-ended survey prompts acknowledged that the requirements were at times overwhelming, but worthwhile at the same time. These findings seemed to tug at the significance of the themes of relevance and motivation by acknowledging that experiences in the classroom and with mentors can influence early career professional learning.

Relevance. I used the theme of relevance to encompass the andragogical principles related to the learners' need to know, self-concept, and prior experiences (Knowles et al. 2015). My review of the literature related to this topic emphasized relevance in adult learning and the potential for improving the experience of new teachers with learning that is meaningful to their current situation and setting (Green & Ballard, 2011; Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008; Johnson, 2012; Shernoff et al., 2011). As I reviewed the data related to this topic, I found references to the relevance of professional learning required by the NDTSS program as well as other professional learning requirements and pursuits. In this section, I will describe how relevance for professional learning related to Knowles et al.'s (2015) principles as well as how relevance seemed steeped in the reasons that the participants chose a teaching career.

The data included few direct references to the teachers' need to know and self-concept in relation to their professional learning experiences. Three interview transcripts included references to changes in self-concept that led to increasing confidence. Jill said that as her confidence increased so did her ability to make changes. She said, "Being able to bounce ideas off of my mentor was a huge reason as to why I felt OK trying different things in the classroom." Knowles et al. (2015) said, "The self-concept of adults is heavily dependent upon a move toward self-direction" (p. 90). As confidence increases along with a secure self-concept, adult learners are more likely to find relevance in their learning (Conway & Zorn-Arnold, 2016). Of the references related to the learners' need to know why it was important to pursue professional learning, most referred to the learning requirements of the NDTSS program and hinted at differing relationships

between the mentor and new teacher. Brynn mentioned that her mentor helped her understand the relevance of the NDTSS requirements and said the process did not feel like “hoop-jumping.” On the other hand, Beth said that as the year went on, she felt frustrated with the “hoops” and did not feel that the requirements were useful. Among responses to the NDTSS survey, six indicated that a mentor from the same content area or grade level would have been beneficial.

Regarding the relevance of an adult learner’s prior experiences, responses to the interview question inquiring why the participants pursued a teaching career provided insight to the beginning teachers’ perceptions of professional learning. Of the eleven interview participants, nine credited their previous experiences as students as one of the reasons they chose teaching as a career. Some referred to inspiration by a particular teacher, and others noted overall positive experiences in the school setting. Coming from a different experience, Drew said he wanted to be “that teacher for students” he did not have. Three of the participants said that family members who were teachers influenced their decision, and four described a struggle with the decision to pursue a career in education that in the end, they could not resist. Kate said that as she pursued a career in a non-education field, she realized, “Oh my gosh! I’m a teacher! It’s in my blood!” Similarly, John said, he “knew in my head that I’d love teaching.” In addition to their experiences as learners, three teachers referred to prior work experiences and three highlighted experiences in college as reasons for pursuing a teaching career.

I included these results in the theme related to relevance because understanding why teachers choose their career can inform decisions about recruiting, retaining, and

educating teachers (see Heinz, 2015). Moreover, the factors that motivated these individuals to become teachers might have served as factors that increased relevance when they considered and pursued professional learning. Osguthorpe and Sanger (2013) described a tension between the intrinsic reasons that inspire future teachers to select their career and the extrinsic pressures of teaching that tend to focus on content and achievement. Understanding the underlying reasons for choosing a teaching career may increase relevance in professional learning (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). Furthermore, attention to factors that inspire an individual to become a teacher also builds a bridge to the theme of motivation, which also emerged during the analysis of the data.

Motivation. The theme of motivation emerged among references to professional learning aimed at meeting the immediate concerns in the classroom as well as indications of the participants' intrinsic desire to learn and grow. When I reviewed the data seeking connections to the principles of andragogy, I found that responses related to Knowles et al.'s (2015) descriptions of readiness to learn, motivation to learn, and orientation to learning connected to the new teachers' motivation to pursue or at least consider professional learning. The conference log comments highlighted a variety of learning topics, hurdles, and successes that the teachers identified and grappled with as they worked with their mentors. My analysis of the conference logs revealed references related to motivation, which I will describe as they applied to Knowles et al.'s core learning principles.

Building on the reasons that teachers cited for selecting their career, an orientation to learning that is intrinsic rather than extrinsic is consistent with andragogical learning (Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles et al. (2015) clarified that although extrinsic motivations are valuable to andragogical learners, “the most potent motivators are internal pressures” (p. 47). I found numerous comments related to intrinsic motivations for teaching in my review of the interview transcripts. Motivations to make a difference, give back, and help others harken to the reasons the participants cited for selecting a teaching career in the first place. Some teachers reflected intrinsic motivation through the work they expended. Hope and Drew both mentioned their goal of continuously improving their practice, and Claire said that “the long, hard days at work really do pay off” because her students were engaged. John said he continuously reflected on what he would do differently and how he would grow. In addition, nearly every teacher mentioned positive experiences that provided motivation to improve and return the following year. Jill, Dawn, John, and Hope all used the word “love” in descriptions about how they felt about their teaching experience, and John said that he felt “great pleasure in knowing that he was part of students reaching their goals.” Returning to the tension between intrinsic motivation and the extrinsic pressures of teaching, one comment from the conference logs also acknowledged the teacher’s need to meet the requirements of administration while also finding self-satisfaction in the teaching experience.

According to Knowles et al. (2015), andragogical learners are motivated to learn “to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations” (p. 46). This orientation to learning

appeared in the 9 of the 11 interview transcripts and provided multiple examples of how the teaching experiences of the new teachers motivated them to work to learn necessary skills and information to carry out their teaching duties. With topics ranging from class management to organizational strategies and from lesson planning to extracurricular activities, the data showed the ways the teachers worked with their mentors to navigate the learning required to get them from one day to the next in their classrooms. Claire described how her mentor helped her develop teaching plans saying, “I wasn’t afraid to tell my mentor about an idea I had ... I’d toss her an idea, and she’d help me polish it.” The variety of learning that took place for the teachers in this study ranged from mundane, yet essential skills such as using grading programs or copy machines, to the processing that Claire described that had the potential to strengthen teaching practices.

Each set of conference logs also included documentation of teachers working with their mentors to quickly learn and understand skills, strategies, and information. Of the six sets of logs, each one had a minimum of four entries dealing with learning what the new teachers needed to know to complete a particular task. Examples of this type of learning included using the school telephone system, understanding standardized test scores, completing requisitions and inventory, dealing with late work, preparing for substitute teachers, and talking more slowly during instruction. It is interesting to note that in all but one set of conference logs, comments related to situations that motivated new teachers to learn new skills or information appeared in the fall and spring semesters showing that different situations throughout the year required attention and learning.

The last andragogical principle that fell within the theme of motivation among the participants in this case study related to the learners' "developing increased competency levels to achieve their full potential" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 90). As I reviewed the data, there was a distinction between the motivation to learn new skills or information and the need to act on that understanding to improve their teaching practice. Claire explained that she learned how to add depth to her lessons, and Rose said that she improved her sense of discipline and procedures. In all, seven of the interview participants commented on how they had improved practices that they had struggled with earlier in the year. Again, each set of conference logs referred to the process of teachers increasing their competency. From using more movement in lessons to reducing seatwork, and from asking higher order questions to observing students during the class periods, the interview transcripts included 31 comments related to improving skills and practices in the classroom. The last question that I asked the interview participants inquired whether they would recommend other first-year teachers to participate in the mentoring program. Like the other teachers, Jill responded affirmatively to the question stating, "I learned a lot about myself and my teaching. I learned how to improve myself as a professional, and I developed new skills that I will use for the rest of my teaching profession." Jill's response provides a link to the third proposition and indicates her perceived value of professional learning with her mentor

Proposition 3 stated that participation in the mentoring program would facilitate andragogical professional learning for the teachers in this case study. My analysis of the data showed that most of the participating teachers found value in the professional

learning that the NDTSS program offered. While enrollment in the mentoring program did not guarantee that every teacher found meaning and motivation to pursue professional learning, the presence of a mentor and overall involvement in the program did present opportunities for andragogical learning. Finally, when teachers perceived that the required learning was relevant, they were often motivated to find meaning in their learning and to apply that learning to their classroom situation.

Proposition 4: Developing Teaching Effectiveness

The fourth proposition aligned with the research subquestion focused on developing teaching effectiveness. I wrote the proposition to suggest that teachers in the mentoring program discussed and developed practices consistent with Danielson's (2007) framework for effective teaching. Danielson's four domains provided guidance as I sought evidence of developing teaching effectiveness during the analysis of the interview transcriptions, conference logs, NDTSS survey responses, and performance rubric scores. The data yielded abundant examples of how the teachers in this study discussed, struggled with, and improved upon practices associated with effective teaching practices as outlined by descriptions of Danielson's four domains, which I used to name the four themes that emerged during analysis of the conference logs and interview transcripts. To set the context for this proposition, I will provide an overview of results of the analyses of the references to Danielson's domains in the conference logs, NDTSS survey results, and performance rubrics.

Setting the context: Evidence of developing teaching effectiveness. An analysis of the data that I collected to inform the last proposition showed that teachers and their

mentors addressed all four domains Danielson (2007) described in her framework for teaching. I used descriptive statistical analysis to portray the ways that the participants developed their teaching effectiveness as they traversed the first year of teaching with their mentors. Findings from the analysis of each data source showed the different ways that teachers and their mentors addressed the domains and illuminated the ways that different teachers in this study perceived and experienced professional learning through the entire NDTSS program. Therefore, before I describe the four themes that emerged during constant comparison, I will provide an overview of the findings of descriptive analysis for each set of data.

Conference logs and evidence of developing teacher effectiveness. On each conference log, the mentors recorded the domain that the teacher identified as the main discussion topic for that conference. The combined sets of conference logs included 108 references to at least one domain in the fall and 89 references in the spring. Overall, the entries showed that the first-year teachers and their mentors spent less time discussing topics related to professional responsibilities than the other three domains. A comparison of the identified domains did not show large differences between the fall and spring semesters, although there were more references to class environment in the fall than the spring and slightly more references to planning and preparation in the spring than the fall. Similarly, Fresko and Alhija (2015) noted that during induction seminars, discussion topics at the beginning of the school year focused more frequently on classroom management, but as the year progressed, topics shifted to instructional practices and professional responsibilities.

My examination of the individual sets of logs for each first-year teacher and mentor pair did not always reflect the compiled results. Each domain consists of components and elements that describe effective teaching (Danielson, 2007). While the conference logs provided documentation that the first-year teachers frequently discussed practices associated with effective teaching with their mentors, the trajectory of these discussions varied considerably among the participants in this case study. For example, one teacher identified classroom environment half the time in the fall and spring semesters. Another teacher identified classroom environment nearly half the time in the fall but identified professional responsibilities more than any other domain in the spring. As a final example, another teacher rarely identified classroom environment as a topic of discussion throughout the year but focused on instruction most often in the fall and planning and preparation in the spring.

When I compared references to the two most frequently reported domains for each teacher for each semester, the results were more consistent with the compiled results. In the fall, the mentors recorded references to the domains related to planning and classroom environment twice as often as the domains related to instruction and professional responsibilities. In the spring, the mentors recorded references to planning and preparation most frequently. The variations among reported discussion topics provided reason to consider that while first-year teachers shared the experience of being new to the profession, their journey through the first year might have been filled with challenges and successes not shared by others. Within the conceptual framework of andragogy, the results suggest that the teachers focused on what was most meaningful to

them at the time.

NDTSS survey results and evidence of developing teacher effectiveness. One prompt on the NDTSS survey included a summary of each of Danielson's domains and directed respondents to select the aspect of teaching that was most impacted by working with their mentor. While it is important to consider the differences in perspectives and timing among the respondents, it is interesting, nonetheless to compare the results of the analysis of the conference logs recorded throughout the year to the responses by NDTSS participants at the end of the school year. My analysis of the conference logs showed that overall, mentors and first-year teachers discussed professional responsibilities less often than the other domains, and they discussed planning and instruction with similar frequencies both semesters. However, the survey responses indicated that by the end of the year, the participants felt their teaching was impacted most in the areas of classroom environment and professional responsibilities. Combined, these findings implied that the NDTSS participants explored and developed in all domains of teaching effectiveness. As a final point of consideration, in response to the survey prompt that stated, "Working with my mentor has impacted the learning of the students in my classroom," 93% of the teachers indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed.

Performance rubrics and evidence of developing teacher effectiveness. Five mentors completed fall and spring performance rubrics that provided descriptions of 10 elements from Danielson's domains (see Appendix C). While the small number of participants in this portion of the study prohibits generalizing the results to the entire case study, the results provided a glimmer of insight into changes in teaching effectiveness as

perceived by the mentors of five NDTSS participants. None of the mentors selected a rating that was the equivalent of “unsatisfactory” on Danielson’s framework (2007, p. 39). By the spring semester, the scores were all the equivalent rating of at least a “proficient” on Danielson’s framework (2007, p. 40). In addition, all of the mentors recorded higher scores for at least half of the elements in the spring semester. There was the least growth noted for knowledge of content and pedagogy and managing student behavior. However, by spring, all mentors reported growth for knowledge of students and communication with students.

The distribution of the rubric scores showed that similar to the conference log discussion topics, while there appeared to be common experiences related to the development of teaching effectiveness, there were differences that likely stemmed from varying experiences, settings, and perspectives. An examination of the rubric scores indicated that, overall, most growth occurred in the area of planning and preparation, and most struggle related to classroom environment. The latter results are consistent with the findings of the NDTSS survey analysis, which revealed the majority of survey respondents, reported that their teaching practice was most impacted in the area of with classroom environment. On the contrary, while the NDTSS survey responses suggested that teachers felt the mentoring program had the least impact on instruction, the results of the rubric analysis showed that only one teacher did not show growth in all elements of this domain. The results of this portion of the study are tenuous because of the small number of respondents, but they showed a positive change in developing effectiveness of five teachers in all four domains.

My analysis of the data offered evidence that the NDTSS mentors and first-year teachers were aware of the practices described by Danielson (2007) that relate to effective teaching, and they made strides toward positive changes in their teaching practice. Whether considering the domains that the first-year teachers identified as the topic of focus during conference logs or the mentors' performance rubric scores, the domains and their descriptions seemed to provide consistent measures and guidelines regarding the development of teaching effectiveness throughout the year with the NDTSS program. The findings of descriptive analysis also showed that different teachers felt that participation in the NDTSS program influenced their teaching in different ways. Qualitative analysis of comments recorded in the conference logs and responses to interview questions yielded increased understanding of the development of teaching effectiveness as described by Danielson's four domains.

Analysis of the conference logs entries and interview transcripts highlighted how the first-year teachers in this study worked with their mentors to better understand and develop effective teaching practices. During qualitative analysis, I reviewed each conference log by reviewing the notes and comments that aligned with Danielson's domains. I used the rubrics in the NDTSS (2014) mentor handbook that described each of the components for the domains as well as Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching to develop the codes that led to the four domains. In a similar fashion, I reviewed the interview transcripts with a focus on questions that asked teachers which domain they addressed with their teachers, how they felt their teaching had changed over the year, and what areas they had identified for continued growth. I aligned analysis of these data with

Danielson's framework, and so I will provide an overview of the findings for each theme, named by Danielson's domains.

Planning and preparation. Danielson (2007) described the domain related to planning and preparation as the "behind-the-scenes work of organizing for classroom instruction" (p. 43). Danielson divided this domain into six components that include the demonstration of "knowledge of content and pedagogy," "knowledge of students," "knowledge of resources," "designing coherent instruction," "designing assessments," and "setting instructional outcomes" (Danielson, 2007, p. 27). Descriptive content analysis of the conference log entries revealed that overall, teachers and their mentors spent the most time discussing items related to this theme during conferences. However, only about one-fourth of the NDTSS survey respondents selected planning and preparation as the aspect of teaching most impacted by their work with the mentors. As I reviewed the conference logs and interview transcripts, I found evidence that the participants and their mentors discussed and worked through challenges associated with planning and preparation when they addressed standards, lesson planning, sequencing, pacing, and exploration of resources to meet the needs of all students.

Evidence of developing effectiveness in the domain of planning and preparation often appeared in the "What I feel good about" portion of the conference logs. Several references linked planning to success in the classroom. One notation celebrated "small group activities are working." Several references indicated success with the planning, execution, and flow of the lessons. A revelation for one teacher was that that "lesson plans required more structure." Other comments revealed the results of planning to

increase relevance in lessons by collaborating with a colleague to implement a cross-curricular activity, inviting guest speakers to the class, and introducing topics that related to current events.

Discussions related to identifying outcomes and goals of instruction appeared more frequently in the spring, and references to content knowledge were evident through comments related to content standards. There was little variation in the type and number of such comments between the fall and spring semesters. Four mentors recorded references related to sequencing and modification of instruction as a source of frustration for some teachers, especially in the fall, specifying topics such as understanding learning styles and modifications for students with special needs. My analysis of the performance rubrics showed that for the small sample in this study, the area of planning and preparation resulted in the most growth over the school year.

Evidence of the teachers' developing effectiveness in the domain of planning and preparation included struggles and challenges. One notation read, "It can be challenging incorporating standards, benchmarks, and objectives into lesson plans while including opening and closing activities that create interest and reinforce learning." Several comments alluded to struggles with pacing, sequencing, and integration of technology in lesson plans, while others hinted at difficulties of meeting the needs of students. For example, one teacher wondered about how to modify an assignment for students with special needs, and another inquired about balancing remediation with meeting the standards. Although there were few comments regarding assessment design and knowledge of students, those aspects of the domain seemed implied in the bigger scheme

of lesson design. The conference logs showed progress through this domain through the year, and the interview transcripts provided an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on their experiences at the end of the year.

My analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that while some teachers looked back on their first year and identified growth in the area of planning and preparation, others looked forward to building the knowledge and skills that would help them develop in this area. Brynn looked back and forward as she explained that her mentor helped her develop content knowledge, but recognized there was still, “so much to know.” Danielson (2007) emphasized the need for teachers to continuously learn and keep abreast of changes in their content area. While Danielson was referring to teachers who had been practicing for a while, several interview participants indicated they were already aware of the need for ongoing learning. Hope articulated her desire to continue improving when she said, “I want to constantly find new ways to relay information and to give the students opportunities to learn in a different way and succeed.” Mark said he wanted to continue to learn how to “be prepared for the unexpected” as he referred to the nimbleness that can result from adequate planning and preparation.

Five other teachers also mentioned lesson planning as an aspect of their teaching practice that they either had improved during their first year of teaching or planned to focus on as an area of improvement in the coming year. Claire explained that her mentor helped her identify and fill gaps in her lesson plans that resulted in improved instruction. Several teachers also mentioned the value of resources and assessments in planning and preparation. Mark said he wanted to learn more about finding and using reliable

resources, while John and Brynn said that their mentors helped them locate and utilize resources. Kate specified that through working with her mentor, she had improved the ability to set learning targets and to scaffold her lessons to deal with multiple preparations. Kate added that her mentor assisted her with the development of assessments and noted her frustrations that occurred when she felt her students knew more than what the assessments showed.

Over half of the teachers mentioned the necessity of understanding students to modify instruction effectively, and some of the teachers said their rural setting made it easier to learn more about their students. Beth said she wanted to “take more risks in differentiation where I don’t just do what is easiest or most convenient for me but what helps every diverse learner to be more successful.” Dawn also acknowledged the work required of modifying instruction but said that, by the end of the school year, she felt more confident in her teaching practice and understood the importance of modifying her lessons depending on the students and the lessons.

The theme of planning and preparation emerged as a consistent topic of conversations between mentors and first-year teachers. By using constant comparison to analyze these data, I learned that the teachers in this study spent abundant time discussing aspects of lesson planning with their mentors. My analysis of the data suggested that teachers also built an understanding of their students, incorporated resources, and planned assessment strategies as they developed an appreciation of the never-ending learning process that encompasses planning and preparation.

Classroom environment. Danielson (2007) emphasized the relationship between classroom environment and the ability of students to attend to their learning and explained that the practices in this domain “set the stage for all learning” (p. 28). This domain includes five components that address “student behavior,” “physical space,” “classroom procedures,” and “establishing respect, rapport,” and “establish a culture for learning” (Danielson, 2007, p. 28). Comments recorded in the conference logs, as well as insight shared during the interviews, showed that for some teachers, this aspect of teaching was a topic of frequent discussion and reflection. The notes recorded in the conference logs showed progress toward developing classroom routines and frustrations with building a culture of learning. A few mentors recorded the topic of managing behavior frequently, while others did not reference this topic at all. Discussions related to building relationships with students often overlapped with the component of building respect and rapport in the classroom. Some teachers also noted work on the physical space of their classrooms.

Comments from the conference logs provided evidence that teachers were discussing and building effectiveness in this domain, and several sets of conference logs showed a progression from the identification of a problem to the evaluation of a solution. Examples of such progressions related to using classroom space, developing routines, and building respect in the classroom. For example, an April entry indicated a teacher’s concern with classroom organization. The “possible solution” section of the log for the same teacher suggested moving cabinets to make room for more tables. The next log included reported that the teacher had rearranged the cabinets and painted several pieces

of furniture to increase organization and improve classroom appearance.

Another set of logs included vacillating reports of classroom routines improving and failing. A November log documented a challenge related to students finishing work at different times. Possible solutions on the same log proposed, “provide something for the kids to do” and “be more strict.” The next log noted that the teacher had provided marker board work for early finishers, and that “seemed to help” maintain control and build a routine. Several weeks later, the concern of establishing routines returned. Another possible solution was to shorten the morning routine. Notes on a subsequent log reported that shortening the routine and adding behavior charts had been effective strategies in alleviating some of the behavior challenges.

A separate set of logs recorded concerns related to building a learning environment. A reappearing challenge was, “kids not caring.” The possible solution stated, “Talk to students” and “Talk to parents.” A subsequent notation reported, “Students who didn’t seem to care are participating more in group projects.” In the spring semester, similar challenges appeared followed by another possible solution to, “give a little extra attention to those who need a push.” By May, the teacher reported feeling good about the fact that students in one class who “didn’t seem to care” were “focused and on task.” In this instance, the teacher and mentor addressed different aspects of one problem throughout most of the year. The conference logs showed evidence of other challenges, celebrations, and concerns, but the consistent focus on classroom environment emphasized the ongoing work that often accompanies the first year of teaching (see Fisher, 2012).

As I reviewed the interview transcripts with a focus on the theme of classroom environment, I gained additional insight into the ways that the teachers progressed through the year with their mentors. I did not ask any questions that pertained exclusively to the classroom environment, so the extent to which teachers focused on this aspect of their teaching varied. Four interview participants did not specifically mention components of their teaching experience that related to this theme, and four identified classroom environment as the area they focused on most with their mentors.

Kate and John said that one of the best parts of participating in the mentoring program was receiving help and support with classroom management. Hope said that participation in the mentoring program “had a significant influence in classroom management practices.” Rose said, “As the year went along, I developed a better sense of how to discipline and how I wanted routines and procedures to go.” Rose continued that she was “not sure what changes would have been made without that part of the program,” and she indicated that observing other teachers and discussing what she saw with her mentor as well as watching her mentor were instrumental in the development of her teaching effectiveness.

Several answers to the question that asked the participants to describe their ideal teaching situation provided insight into challenges within this domain during the school year. John said he would teach in a school where there was no bullying and where students, as well as adults, would treat each other with respect. Brynn replied that she would teach in a school where students would be “engaged and learning with no senioritis.” In addition to identifying challenges associated with managing routines,

procedures, and behaviors, Dawn also recognized the responsibility of establishing the feel of the classroom. She explained that a difference between teaching and student teaching was that as a teacher because it was her responsibility to establish procedures that would allow her to maintain a classroom environment that was conducive to learning.

Through the analysis of all data sources, the theme of classroom environment emerged as a resounding component of developing teacher effectiveness for the participants in this study, who often referred to classroom management. Establishing and maintaining classroom management is an important and complex practice, which teachers can strengthen through attention, reflection, and work with a mentor, but for many, it is still an ongoing and arduous process that can become more challenging as the year progresses (Fisher, 2012; Pellegrino, 2010). The performance rubrics reflected such challenges by showing the least overall growth in managing student behavior. However, my analysis of the domains that the teachers addressed during conferences, as well as insights and perspectives revealed during analysis of the interview transcripts, showed that teachers increased their understanding and effectiveness of the aspects of teaching that build a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.

Instruction. Danielson (2007) stressed that the domain related to instruction “reflects the primary mission of schools: to enhance student learning” (p. 29). Danielson explained that this domain relates to planning and preparation because teachers carry out their plans through instruction. This domain includes five components, which consist of “communicating with students,” “using questioning and discussion techniques,”

“engaging students in learning,” “using assessment in instruction,” and “demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness.” My analysis of the data showed that teachers and their mentors focused on engagement, assessments, and flexibility. In some cases, as I reviewed the data, I found it challenging to determine whether the comments related more accurately to planning and preparation or instruction. When discussion seemed focused on what happened in the classroom, I coded the event as part of instruction. The conference logs included references to this theme but lacked the continuity from a problem to a solution that was evident in the theme related to classroom environment. For the most part, references to instruction were discrete and less likely to have supporting information about the situation. As such, I will describe conference log references to instruction by topic.

The topic that mentors recorded most frequently in the logs related to engaging students in learning. To distinguish between the types of engagement that related to instruction rather than classroom environment, I looked for references to engaging students in a particular unit or activity directly associated with instruction. For example, a focus of one conference was how to involve more students in a lab activity during one class period. The majority of references to engagement were recorded under the “what feels the most challenging” section of the conference logs. Four of the six sets of logs included notes related to keeping students engaged for the entire period and struggling to develop a lesson that interested students. Two different teachers noted excitement in increased student engagement during projects.

References related to the use of assessments centered on using results of

standardized assessments and using assessments designed by the teacher. One comment reflected that a teacher was feeling overwhelmed with the amount of information on an assessments and how to use it. Two subsequent logs included plans for the mentor to help that teacher understand and use standardized assessment results. The topic of assessments was not frequent in the conference logs, but one mentor recorded five references dealing with challenges and supports related to the use of assessments. The mentor noted plans to find tools and supports and time to work with the teacher in this area. Another set of conference logs included documentation of plans to use technology to assess learning.

Other topics related to this theme include communication and flexibility, which occurs when a teacher must adjust instructional plans (Danielson, 2007). The topic of flexibility appeared in two sets of conference logs. One set of logs showed five entries related to the teacher's concerns and challenges dealing with students performing below grade level. Another mentor reported success in adapting plans when technology did not work as expected during a lesson. The topic of communicating with students appeared in three sets of conference logs. One such documentation included a compliment from the mentor after an observation stating, "You are a teacher!" Another mentor recorded the teacher's realization that small group work needed to be well organized and clearly explained to students. Later in the set of logs, the same teacher asked, "Why aren't students understanding the directions given?" indicating that the teacher was increasing in awareness about a practice where there was room for improvement.

The interview transcripts revealed fewer comments related to instruction compared to the other themes. Nonetheless, the comments related to instruction showed

some evidence of developing effectiveness and building awareness. Three teachers said they focused more on the domain dealing with instruction than any other domain as they worked with their mentor, although two teachers specified that those discussions centered on assessments. Kate focused mostly on planning and preparation with her mentor, but she said when she looked back on the school year, she realized she had learned a lot about how to use results from summative and formative assessments to provide better feedback to her students. When Dawn looked back on her progress, she said that she realized she needed to make changes in her teaching style during the year, although she did not always discuss the changes with her mentor.

Several interesting insights related to instruction developed as teachers compared working with a mentor to working with a supervising teacher during student teaching. Hope said that as a student teacher, she knew her supervising teacher might step in to rescue the lesson if things started to go wrong, but as the classroom teacher, she knew the responsibility was all hers to “take back control” if things were not going as planned. Beth explained that, as a student teacher, she was nervous about delivering a perfect lesson that would impress her supervising teacher, but she asked her mentor to observe her teaching topics or methods that made her nervous so she could receive feedback on her teaching practice. Drew also referred to the stresses of teaching when he said, “there is a lot of pressure in the first year of teaching. This program helps eliminate some of that and help the teacher focus on teaching.” Overall, the teachers who participated in the interviews were more likely to discuss planning and preparation than instruction, but references to instruction intertwined with other themes that related to this proposition.

The theme of instruction emerged with connections to the themes of planning and preparation and classroom environment. This finding is consistent with Danielson's (2007) descriptions of effective teaching practices. Danielson explained that the classroom environment sets the tone for learning, and effective planning and preparation allow the teacher to "arrange for learning" (p. 27). The interview transcripts provided insight into the ways the teachers developed the understanding that instruction improves with thorough planning and effective classroom management. This insight may also increase understanding about why teachers reported their work with their mentors influenced the area of instruction with less frequency than the other three domains. Addressing issues related to classroom management may have seemed so urgent to the teachers that they overlooked the connections to effective instruction. However, during the interviews, when teachers had time to reflect on their first year, an understanding of those connections appeared to be evident as did their developing effectiveness.

Professional responsibilities. Danielson (2007) explained that the practices related to this domain "are associated with being a true professional educator" (p. 30). Six components comprise this domain, which includes "reflecting on teaching," "maintaining accurate records," "communicating with families," "participating in a professional community," "growing and developing professionally," and "showing professionalism" (p. 30). My review of the conference logs and interview transcripts showed that the emphasis on this theme related to professional learning, communicating with parents, and maintaining records.

The six sets of conference logs varied significantly in the level of specificity with

which mentors recorded the first-year teachers' references to professional responsibilities. For the most part, the mentors who recorded comments related to this topic focused on the learning that took place through the mentoring program. Four of the logs included references to required classroom observations and subsequent discussions that followed. One mentor referred to all six observations in a similar sequence that started in the "next steps" portion of the conference log. The next step for the teacher was to observe a particular class with a focus on a particular aspect of teaching that, over the year, included classroom management, delivery of instruction, and assessment techniques. The documented "next step" for the mentor was to schedule the observation. The focus of the following conference was to discuss the observation. Several times, in the "next step" section of the logs, the mentors recorded plans for the teacher to implement one of the strategies in the near future.

All mentors reported at least one discussion related to grading, requisitions, and inventories. Three sets of logs included the first-year teachers' challenging questions that dealt with retention of students, how many grades to record for a grading period, or how often to assess learning. Topics related to parents centered on parent-teacher conferences. While several logs included simple documentation that the conferences had gone well, one set of logs outlined the steps the teacher and mentor followed to prepare for the conferences. The logs documented concerns that the first-year teacher identified regarding conferences that were accompanied by next steps to draft documentation of progress for each student and then review the documentation with the mentor before the conferences.

Other references to this theme appeared to a lesser degree, indicating that different teachers progressed through the domain of professional learning with different emphases. This variation is consistent with the theory of andragogy, which suggests that teachers pursue the professional learning that is most pertinent to their situation (Knowles et al., 2015). One set of logs documented the stress and success experienced by a first-year teacher who taught a particular program while a group of visiting teachers observed. Several logs documented participation in graduate-level courses or certification programs. One first-year teacher indicated positive experiences in a professional learning community, and two noted their comfort level was increasing as they worked with members of the staff. Finally, evidence of reflection appeared in four logs and ranged from discussions following observations a recording of the first-year teacher to plans for next year.

Danielson (2007) explained that neither students nor parents observe much of the work related to professional responsibilities, but that it is central to effective teaching. This phenomenon seemed to apply to the teachers who participated in the interviews because they did not identify components related to this theme as frequently as the other themes. Hope was the only teacher who said that she and her mentor focused most on the domain related to professional responsibilities, but five of the teachers described the way that participation in the mentoring program helped them learn the ways that reflection can help them develop and improve their practice. Rose said that working with her mentor did not change her thoughts about teaching, but it “made me reflect more on my own teaching and helped me tweak my teaching style.” Similarly, Hope said that before

working with her mentor, reflection was not something she did “very well,” but by reflecting on her teaching with her mentor, she was able to identify necessary changes in her teaching practice. Kate and John also mentioned their appreciation of having time and guidance as they reflected on their teaching practice over the school year. In addition to references about reflection, two teachers said that their rural setting improved opportunities to collaborate with parents and community members. One teacher identified working with a professional learning community as a goal for future professional development.

References to the theme of professional responsibilities were less abundant in the conference logs and interview transcripts than the other themes. In contrast, the NDTSS survey respondents selected this domain as the one impacted by work with their mentor second only to classroom environment. Analysis of the combined data sources showed that teachers addressed the pressing aspects of teaching that fall within this theme, such as record keeping, communication with parents, and requirements of the NDTSS program. In addition, the ways that some teachers described their understanding of the professional reflection linked this practice to work with their mentors and with their perception of developing teacher effectiveness.

The data that I collected and analyzed to address the proposition related to developing teaching effectiveness showed that the teachers in this study focused on different aspects of professional learning as they worked through the first year with their mentors. The results revealed that each first-year teacher and mentor addressed topics related to developing effectiveness as they worked through the NDTSS requirements

within their teaching context. The results implied that the teachers in this case study did not enter the teaching profession with the same set of skills, perspectives, experiences, or priorities. Despite the differences, the data provided evidence that the participants discussed practices that are consistent with effective teaching practices as described in Danielson's (2007) framework for effective teaching. In addition, the data provided evidence that the teachers in this study increased the effectiveness with which they carried out one or more teaching practices related to planning, classroom environment, instruction, or professional responsibilities.

Summary

The case study design allowed me to collect and analyze data that provided multiple layers and perspectives of one group of teachers starting their careers in rural schools in North Dakota. A thorough examination and analysis of the interview transcripts, performance rubrics, NDTSS conference logs, and survey results yielded sufficient findings to support all four propositions that guided this study. The analysis of data showed that the teachers in this case study experienced challenges and benefits that related to the rural settings of the schools where they started their careers. Participation in the NDTSS mentoring program also appeared to ease some of those struggles, facilitate professional learning, and ameliorate teaching effectiveness. These findings also allowed me to reject the rival propositions.

With the understanding that teaching in a rural setting is likely to influence the teaching experience, I have developed a project for first-year, rural teachers who are participants in the NDTSS mentoring program, although it would likely be useful to

nonparticipants as well. Based on findings from the literature review, as well as from this study, that working with a mentor eases the stresses of first-year teaching, as a component of this project, I included suggestions and supports for the new teachers working with mentors. These suggestions will correspond with the supports already provided for the NDTSS mentors. While the results of this study highlighted the value of a mentor within the school setting, some of the teachers also indicated that a mentor who teaches at the same grade level and content area would have been beneficial to their experience. With these findings in mind, I included strategies and resources for those who are single-grade or content-area teachers in their school to seek and find sources support within specific grade levels and content areas.

There was no doubt that the participants in this study valued professional learning. However, many expressed that they were overwhelmed with the responsibilities and time constraints that accompanied their experiences. These findings prompted me to develop a professional development project that is consistent with the theory of andragogical learning. In particular, I included flexibility in the project so participants can select topics that fit their professional learning needs and interests. To accommodate teachers in rural settings that are also remote from learning opportunities, I designed the project with online supports. In Section 3, I will explain how the literature supports this project design, which I centered on the findings of this study. I will also describe other aspects of the project that include additional findings from this study such as reflection, teacher identity, understanding the expected experiences of first-year teaching, and setting professional goals aimed at improving teaching effectiveness.

The bounded case of first-year teachers who participated in this study shared their time, described their experience, and permitted me with access to the conversations that took place with their mentors for one school year. While their experiences may not be typical of all first-year teachers in rural schools, the stories that unfolded from my analysis of the data showed that as Danielson (2007) described, teaching is “complex” (p. 2), exhausting, and filled with decisions, questions, and stresses. These factors are often amplified during the first year of teaching. Among the teachers in this study, however, those factors were overshadowed by the teachers’ desire to do better, learn more, and start over again in the coming year. The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the experiences and the developing effectiveness of first-year rural schools. While there is more to learn, the findings of this study point to specific strategies that will provide even more support through professional learning opportunities. The findings also give cause to encourage the continuation of rigorous mentoring programs such as the NDTSS program.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In Section 2, I described the results of data analysis aimed at increasing the understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of the NDTSS participants who were teaching in rural schools during the 2014–2015 school year. The results showed that all 11 teachers in this bounded case study recommended participation in the NDTSS program. In addition, the results revealed that some teachers who responded to the NDTSS survey and participated in the interviews felt overwhelmed with the multitude of responsibilities related to their first year of teaching. In this section, I will describe a professional development project for new teachers in the mentoring program who are teaching in rural schools in North Dakota. I developed this project after analyzing the data, reflecting on the results, and reviewing the literature.

The analysis of the data sources I collected in this study yielded findings that described the struggles and successes experienced by the participants in this study. I reflected on those findings as I set forth to develop a project that aligned with the findings. I was challenged, however, to develop a project that would meet the requirements of Walden University's doctoral program, while respecting the needs and perceptions of the first-year teachers who were already experiencing support from their mentors along with stress from some of the experiences of first-year teaching. To meet the project requirements and address the needs revealed in the findings, I developed a professional learning experience aimed at filling some gaps revealed in my study. The learning experience, which is comprised of three full-day sessions, has minimal content

and maximum opportunities for collaboration, exploration, and reflection to support teachers in a way that aligns with the findings of this case study.

Rationale

First-year teachers are busy. The findings of this case study portrayed the first year of teaching as one filled with new responsibilities, learning experiences, challenges, and celebrations. Participation in the NDTSS program provided the participants in my study multiple layers of support while also requiring the new teachers to begin their career with an investment in professional learning. The time first-year teachers spent working with their mentors, observing other teachers, and reflecting on their teaching offered learning opportunities aimed at strengthening teaching practices. With the understanding that the teachers were already meeting deadlines and requirements from their teaching positions as well as the NDTSS program, I strived to develop a project that would offer a low-stress option to access resources and supports that are not readily available. Following the andragogical framework of this study, I also sought a means to provide a professional learning experience that would be relevant to their immediate teaching situation.

I selected areas of focus for professional learning with the goal of meeting the needs of teachers in rural schools who are already receiving support from the NDTSS mentoring program. The findings of my study showed that for the most part, the NDTSS participants were working effectively with their mentors with a strong focus on standards for effective teaching and learning about the day-to-day workings of their school setting. I also discovered that because of the small school setting, many teachers had limited

access to teachers within the same content area or grade level. Furthermore, analysis of interview transcripts revealed that some teachers struggled to reconcile the disparity between their aspirations of being a teacher and the day-to-day reality of their experiences. I used these findings to develop a professional development project for teachers in rural settings who are working with a mentor but lacking opportunities for collaboration with teachers in similar content areas or grade levels. As a secondary component to the framework of this project, I also addressed teacher identity based on comments shared by some of the participants in my study related to the experiences of teaching not matching expectations of teaching. In this section, I will review recent literature related to these topics, and then I will describe the project, its evaluation, and implications. The course materials are available in Appendix A.

Review of the Literature

Before setting forth with the development of a professional development project, I reviewed current literature, with publication dates ranging between 2012 and 2017, related to the topic of professional learning for first-year teachers. In my search, I used combinations of three categories of terms. The first category of key terms included *professional development*, *professional learning*, and *induction*. The second category of terms included *first-year teachers*, *new teachers*, *beginning teachers*, *novice teachers*, and *early career teachers*. The third group of terms included *mentoring*, *rural*, *content-specific*, *teacher identity*, *online learning*, and *digital learning*. I used Education Resources Information Center, Sage, Proquest Central, and Google Scholar in my search. I sought articles from peer-reviewed journals, and I also incorporated information from

other literature that was pertinent to my review. I knew I was approaching saturation when my searches yielded repeat results with similar references to authors and research.

I organized the findings of my literature review into the three broad topics of *professional learning for new teachers*, *developing teacher identity*, and *delivery of professional learning*. The continued focus on mentoring and rural teaching led to a bit of overlap between these three main categories as I searched for articles. Nonetheless, this organization allowed me to use the findings of my review to develop a professional learning experience for the target audience that is consistent with the conceptual framework and findings of this study. In this section, I will highlight findings from a review of the literature that validated the development of a project set in an andragogical, constructivist framework to provide additional support for rural teachers in the NDTSS program. Because many of the articles I reviewed referred to professional learning through and beyond the first year of teaching, I included the terms *new teachers* and *beginning teachers* along with the term first-year teachers.

Professional Learning for New Teachers

Although I limited my search queries for literature published between the years between 2012 and 2017, I found multiple articles with references to Feiman-Nemser's (2001) work that related to professional development for preservice and beginning teachers. I used some of the ideas outlined in Feiman-Nemser's writing to build the foundation for the development of my project. Feiman-Nemser emphasized that first-year teachers "have two jobs – they have to teach, and they have to learn to teach" (p. 1026) as they switch from being "students of teaching to teacher of students" (p. 1027). This shift

in learning focus is a complex and multifaceted process for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). For example, Adoniou (2016) followed 14 urban Australian teachers through their first year of teaching and explained that not only was their experience more challenging than they had anticipated, but the challenges were different for each participant, which provides a connection to the andragogical and constructivist framework of this study. Adoniou emphasized that the teachers in her study sought “specific support on what they could do to continue to improve learning outcomes in the children in their classes” (p. 358). DeAngelis, Wall, and Che (2013) provided additional insight into the transition from student to teacher in their study, which examined survey responses of more than 1,000 teachers in one unidentified state in the United States. Analysis of the survey responses and state employment records showed that while both teacher preparation and mentoring are important influences in the development of teaching effectiveness, “high quality comprehensive mentoring and induction” (DeAngelis et al., 2013, p. 351) can mitigate inadequate preservice education.

Across the literature, there is a consistent message that a strong mentoring program, complemented by appropriate professional learning, can provide the guidance and support for teachers to navigate the complex journey of beginning teaching. As a final example of the value of professional learning in the beginning years of teaching, Luft, Dubois, Nixon, and Campbell (2015) reviewed 104 articles published between 1982 and 2012 focused on research related to beginning science teachers. Luft et al. outlined their findings through the lens of science teaching standards. Similar to findings by Adoniou (2016) and DeAngelis et al. (2013), Luft et al. emphasized the complex

interplay between preservice education and early teaching induction. To provide more detail about professional learning for first-year teachers, I selected two areas of focus that coincided with those already provided by the NDTSS mentoring program. These areas, which were identified by Feiman-Nemser (2001), include “enacting a beginning repertoire in purposeful ways” (p. 1029) and “learning in and from practice” (p. 1030).

Purposefully enacting a beginning repertoire. If teachers have had a successful preservice experience, they venture toward teaching with a foundation of content and pedagogical knowledge that they must put into practice (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Luft et al., 2015). Wasley, Hampel, and Clark (1997) described a teaching repertoire by saying that it includes, “a variety of techniques, skills, and approaches in all dimensions of education – curriculum, instruction, and assessment – that teachers have at their fingertips to stimulate the growth of the children with whom they work” (p. 45). Feiman-Nemser (2001) proposed that while a preservice teacher builds a teaching repertoire, a beginning teacher must put the repertoire components into action. The ways and the extent to which new teachers enact those components appear, at least in part, to be the result of the interaction of preservice learning and current teaching context (Thompson, Windschitl, & Braaten, 2013). Professional discussions focused on student learning can increase understanding between new and veteran teachers and increase the likelihood that new teachers will carry out innovative teaching practices from their beginning repertoire (Correa, Martíñez-Arbelaiz, & Apraiz, 2015; Thompson et al., 2013).

Within specific content areas, the literature similarly showed that discussions, focused on pedagogy and student understanding, can support beginning teachers as they

implement and develop their teaching repertoire. Feiman-Nemser (2001) explained that this type of discussion “involves rich descriptions of practice, attention to evidence, examination of alternative interpretations, and possibilities” (p. 1043). Thompson et al. (2013) analyzed 2 years’ worth of observations and interview transcripts and found that a sample of 26 new science teachers from the northwestern United States followed different “trajectories of practice” (p. 574), ranging from innovative to traditional, as they implemented their beginning repertoire. For new teachers oriented toward student-centered teaching, professional discourse guided teachers toward successful implementation of practices “focusing on student engagement and evidence of learning as fundamental teaching” (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 576). Moreover, discussions and supports directed at helping new teachers understand student-centered teaching can increase “teacher persistence” (Wong & Luft, 2015, p. 622). Wong and Luft (2015), who compared 35 teachers who “were representative of the average secondary science teacher in the USA” (p. 626), defined teacher persistence as the “commitment to, and continuation in, classroom teaching despite experienced challenges or difficulties at the school or district level” (p. 622). This definition of persistence points further to the goal of increasing teacher retention but also to improving the experience of beginning teachers.

The relationship between professional discourse and the development of a professional repertoire seems to span content areas and grade levels. A case study of three elementary teachers showed that professional discussion focused on math instruction helped new teachers improve their teaching and gain an appreciation of the

complexity of teaching (Scott, Clarkson, & McDonough, 2012). Similarly, Zhang (2014) described the experiences of new teachers implementing common core state standards (CCSS) in mathematics and English, finding that discussion and collaboration with other teachers presented supports and challenges as they worked to develop the skills and knowledge required to teach the standards. On the one hand, content specific, school-wide, and even online collaboration provided support that helped the new teachers utilize their preservice learning to meet the CCSS (Zhang, 2014). On the other hand, some teachers in the study encountered challenges in collaboration with veteran teachers who were resistant to the CCSS (Zhang, 2014).

Sometimes, new teachers meet resistance within their teaching contexts when they implement innovative practices from their teaching repertoire for various reasons that may stem from skepticism among veteran teachers or fear of disrupting the status quo (Correa et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013; Zhang, 2014). Thompson et al. (2013) described the tension between approaches to teaching where one approach “pressed for ambitious teaching and the other ...supported more standard forms of teaching” (p. 601). Thompson et al. acknowledged that the pathways for developing effective teaching repertoires vary in time and context, and while some teachers struggled to surpass the status quo and implement student-centered practices, others in similar settings were able to make effective changes in their repertoire. In Spain, a study focused on five early-education teachers also highlighted the challenges that new teachers face when implementing changes to the teaching context (Correa et al., 2015). Correa et al. (2015) explained that implementing new strategies was a struggle for new teachers who did not

have access to experienced teachers who were open to new ideas and strategies. However, Correa et al. also posited that in settings where innovation and input from new teachers were valued, collaboration with veteran teachers could result in the development of improved teaching practices and strengthened teaching identities for the new teachers. While implementing the repertoire is important, Feiman-Nemser (2001) explained that a related factor in professional learning is related to classroom practice.

Learning in and from practice. The repertoire of teachers starting their careers in the classroom likely includes innovative and challenging practices (Thompson et al., 2013). It is also likely that there will be abundant opportunities to improve those practices (Kane & Francis, 2013, Luft et al., 2015). Once again, a key to improvement rests with opportunities to discuss and collaborate “with others about their teaching, to analyze students’ work, to examine problems, and to consider alternative explanations and actions” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1030). Even when teachers enter their classrooms with a repertoire of knowledge and skills, they may struggle with the flexibility that is often required to adapt and modify plans (Kane & Francis, 2013). Kane and Francis (2013) reviewed qualitative and quantitative data collected from new teachers in Ontario, Canada to learn how an induction program facilitated professional learning for new teachers. Beginning teachers who had the chance to work with their mentors in multiple, interactive ways such as observing their mentors teaching, and receiving feedback following observations of their teaching could use their findings to improve their practice (Kane & Francis, 2013). Such professional learning is further enhanced when teachers have a choice in the type and topic of their professional learning (Moliter, Burkett,

Cunningham, Dell, & Presta, 2014; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014; Simos, 2013; Steeg & Lambson, 2015).

Affording new teachers choices in their professional learning is also important because the process of improving teaching practice is complex and dependent upon the teaching context (Luft et al., 2015). An induction program in Ontario, Canada provided new teachers with choices of learning formats and topics that were part of a framework that included an inquiry-based cycle of “planning, implementing, reflecting, and redesigning” (Moliter et al., 2014, p. 54). Moliter et al. (2014) reported early positive results to this professional learning approach for new teachers and emphasized the benefits of “teacher choice and collaboration” (p. 56). Simos (2013) also stressed the benefits of involving new teachers in the trajectory of their professional learning pathway. When new teachers in an urban high school English department had the opportunity to participate with their mentors to develop identified teaching skills, teacher retention increased by over 80% (Simos, 2013). Likewise, Steeg and Lambson (2015) outlined a professional development design at one elementary school in the southwestern United States that maximized opportunities for teachers to select the topics and pace of their professional learning with a focus on improving classroom practice. By observing one team of fifth-grade teachers that included a new teacher, an experienced teacher, and a teacher with three years of experience, the authors emphasized the promising potential of the professional learning design (Steeg & Lambson, 2015). Although the program did not continue after a change in administration, Steeg and Lambson touted the potential of a “collaborative and coherent” (p. 478) plan where teachers guided the professional

learning process. Connecting the autonomy that accompanies choice in professional learning with the process of building understanding, Adoniou (2015) described a framework that organized “three knowledge discourses: knowing what, knowing how, and knowing why” (p. 106).

Adoniou (2015) explained that while all three areas are vital to effective teaching, new teachers are likely to understand why the content they teach is important, but they need support in developing a knowledge of what and how they will teach to increase student learning. The NDTSS participants began their career with a mentor and a repertoire, built during preservice learning, which consisted of pedagogical and content knowledge and skills. Through collaboration with their mentors as well as other professional learning opportunities, new teachers had the opportunity to use an inquiry approach to strengthen their teaching practice (see Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Helping teachers understand and develop their professional identity can ease and enhance the process of improving their teaching process (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Katz, McGinnis, Riedinger, Marbach-Ad, & Dai, 2013). The link between professional learning and professional identity is evident in the work of Katz et al. (2013). The professional learning, which was focused on science instruction appeared to help the new teachers build a teaching identity that increased “resilience, excitement, and engagement in science teaching” (Katz et al., 2013, p. 1357). After analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from two elementary science teachers, Katz et al. concluded that at least in part because of the teachers’ voluntary participation in professional learning, their teaching identity developed during their first year of teaching.

Teacher Identity

Most of the teachers I interviewed articulated the process or motivation that guided them to the teaching profession and that they had a vision of themselves as effective teachers. I reviewed the literature to determine the extent to which professional learning that addresses teacher identity might improve the experiences and developing effectiveness of beginning teachers. Although I did not find clear connections to improving the experiences of new teachers, I found rationale in the literature for supporting new teachers to develop their professional identity. For this study, I used Feiman-Nemser's (2001) description of a teacher's "coherent sense of themselves as professionals" (p. 1029) to define teacher identity. Feiman-Nemser stressed that the process of developing a teacher identity is "a complex, ongoing practice" (p. 1029) that combines teachers' ranges of educational experiences as well as their perceptions and dreams about the teacher they aspire to become.

Teacher identity influences the myriad decisions teachers make each day, and so it is important to consider how professional learning opportunities can guide teachers to understand and develop their professional identity (Hsieh, 2015). Dugas (2016) identified three themes related to identity that describe how new teachers perceive themselves as a teacher, how they want to be perceived by their students, and "the tension between effective practices and practices that are congruent with one's identity" (p. 25). Although new teachers anticipate that they will be successful teachers, Adoniou (2016) explained that such confidence does not necessarily result in teaching effectiveness.

Teacher identity and teaching repertoire. My review of the literature suggested

that new teachers' professional identities can influence the extent to which they enact their teaching repertoire in areas that range from pedagogy to classroom management. Thompson et al. (2013) referred to teacher identity as a connection between professional learning and professional practice that could determine whether a teacher focused on "ambitious or conservative forms of teaching" (p. 575). When Thompson et al. interviewed and observed beginning science teachers for two years, the authors identified three pathways toward developing a teaching repertoire that ranged in effectiveness to engage students and assess student learning. While Thompson et al. acknowledged that all teachers in the study showed growth during their first year, those who developed ambitious teaching practices were also likely to have a correspondingly ambitious vision of themselves as teachers and to seek professional discourse with teachers who valued similar teaching practices. Like Thompson et al., Avraamidou (2014) mentioned the potential of supportive colleagues in helping new teachers develop effective teaching practices. With a focus on one elementary teacher, Avraamidou collected data over 5 years to learn about the development of a science teaching identity. The results of the case study showed that the teacher's science teaching identity fluctuated during the transitions from a positive exposure to a methods classes to a stifling field experience and then to a first-year teaching experience in a supportive and collaborative setting (Avraamidou, 2014).

In addition to teaching content, classroom management is another important component of the teaching repertoire. Dugas (2016) explained that frustrations and struggles with classroom management can arise when events in the classroom counter the

teacher's perceptions of how things should be happening. Through the analysis of interview transcripts with 16 first-year Chicago public school teachers, Dugas described the conflicts between teachers' desire to be perceived by students in a positive light and their identity of being in control. Like the teachers I interviewed, Dugas noted that some teachers had an identity of themselves as a teacher before their first day in the classroom, and when classroom management was a struggle, a conflict with their teaching identity could arise. In fact, teachers' beginning identity can impede classroom management if "their identity acts as the driving force in their management choices" (Dugas, 2016, p. 26). Similar to the findings by Avraamidou (2014) and Thompson et al. (2013), Dugas' findings highlighted the complexity of shaping a teacher identity that can foster the development of effective teaching practices while providing guidance and support through the first years of teaching.

Developing teacher identity. The development of teacher identity is a convoluted process that encompasses and intertwines early dreams of becoming a teacher with early teaching experiences (Morrison, 2013). Beginning teachers frequently lack guidance in developing their teacher identity (Dugas, 2016). However, lack of guidance does not mean that there is a lack of identity. Without support, a gap can develop between a new teacher's expectations of classroom teaching and their experiences in the classroom (Adoniou, 2016). Mentoring programs can provide valuable support and guidance for new teachers to understand and develop their identity while maneuvering the challenges of first-year teaching (Adoniou, 2016; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin,

2012). Additional professional learning opportunities may compliment the day-to-day support provided by a mentor (Adoniou, 2016; Hsieh, 2015; Kane & Francis, 2013).

A longitudinal, qualitative study seeking insight into the development of the teaching identities of beginning teachers included the description of one teacher who struggled with professional isolation in a rural setting (Morrison, 2013). Morrison (2013) explained that the identity of a new teacher, who started the school year eager to begin a long career of teaching was “replaced by a concentration on survival” (p. 127). Morrison emphasized that the professional identities of beginning teachers, especially in rural schools are more likely to thrive in the presence of mentorship, collegiality, and support. Hsieh (2015) also pointed to the importance of collegial support and professional learning in guiding the development of the teaching identities of new teachers. Focusing on three California teachers, Hsieh highlighted the benefits of professional learning and reflection for new teachers as they strived to find the balance between identity and effectiveness. When a teacher does not have access to guidance and reflection that can align identity and practice, a teacher’s identity may impede the development of effective practice. For example, Hsieh described a teacher whose identity was centered on specific teaching styles to the extent that adjusting to more effective teaching practices did not take place.

Consistent with the theory of andragogy, professional learning opportunities that provide new teachers choice and relevancy are likely to equip teachers with the understanding and skills necessary to teach in ways that are increasingly consistent with their aspirations of good teaching (Adoniou, 2016). Adoniou (2016) analyzed interview transcripts, classroom observations, and surveys from 14 teachers beginning their career

in Australia. Consistent with the findings of Hsieh (2015) and Morrison (2013), Adoniou noted that the teachers began the year understanding that there would be challenges and a “deep desire to make a difference in children’s lives” (p. 358). Of the 14 teachers Adoniou studied over a 16-month period, half ended their first year with serious reservations about staying in the teaching career, at least in part, because they were “struggling to be the teachers they had envisaged being” (p. 348). Adoniou emphasized aligning mentor support with individual teachers’ needs and suggested fostering conversations that allow new teachers to align vision and practice. These practices include building a common understanding of goals, establishing a trust that allows for honest discussions and feedback, and encouraging the aspirations and practices of the new teacher (Adoniou, 2016). Gaps can exist between new teachers’ personal and professional lives (Clandinin et al., 2015). Clandinin et al. (2015) proposed possible benefits of affording new teachers opportunities to discuss and reflect on these gaps to “support them in making new sense of themselves as people who are beginning to teach” (p. 13).

Beyond mentoring relationships, professional learning can also provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and assess the ways that their teaching practices align with their developing identities (Correa et al., 2015; Hsieh, 2015; Pillen, Den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). A writing group of 15 beginning teachers in the United States was the focus of a study conducted by two teacher educators who also facilitated writing about, reflecting on, and discussing their first-year teaching experiences (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). According to Schultz and Ravitch (2013), the

professional identities of the 15 teachers, who came to teaching through traditional and alternative pathways, were influenced by different “knowledge communities” (p. 43) that included the writing group as well as other cohorts that varied from personal to professional. In the Netherlands, Pillen et al. (2013) analyzed surveys of over 300 first-year teachers to learn about tensions related to the development of identity. Like Schultz and Ravitch, Pillen et al. acknowledged that professional discourse with mentors and other colleagues, university instructors, and fellow first-year teachers could be constructive on various levels. Such discussions helped new teachers realize they were not alone in their struggles and also led to awareness as well as support that guided the teachers as they worked through the challenges of aligning their teaching identity to effective teaching practices (Pillen et al., 2013).

My analysis of the interview transcripts of the NDTSS participants in this study revealed that the teachers entered their career with a vision of becoming effective teachers. My review of the literature showed that an understanding of teacher identity connects in multiple ways to the experiences and effectiveness of first-year teachers. Dugas (2016) proposed that teachers must “explore and understand” (p. 27) the relationship between their identity and their practice so they can implement, “effective management practices [that] will not come into conflict with their identity (p. 27). I used some of the suggestions proposed by Dugas as conversation topics during the professional learning opportunities aimed at helping teachers clarify and understand this topic and how they might be able to continue conversations related to this topic with their mentors.

Delivery of Professional Learning Opportunities

I searched the literature to find research related to the delivery of professional learning for new teachers in rural settings. Distance from professional learning opportunities can limit the ability of teachers in rural settings to access professional learning (Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell, & Kaminski, 2015). A review of my findings revealed that in addition to geographical distances for some teachers, time constraints might present additional hurdles to pursuing professional learning. I prepared my project as 3 days of face-to-face learning presented within regions of the state and enriched with an online component to foster ongoing collaboration and communication. In my review of the literature, I found that research points to online learning as one way to reduce barriers to professional learning and increase the opportunities for collaboration among teachers in rural settings (Bell-Robertson, 2015; Broadley, 2012). The andragogical framework of this study holds another crucial piece in delivering meaningful learning to new teachers. Hunt-Barron et al. (2015) stressed that teachers “need to see any online activity as something from which they or their students will directly benefit” (p. 11). In this section, I will outline how I used findings from recent literature to develop a professional learning format for NDTSS participants that offers accessibility, relevance, and options for collaboration.

Accessibility. I reviewed the literature to seek information about increasing the accessibility of professional learning to teachers regarding distance, content area, and time. Online learning opportunities can reduce or eliminate struggles related to accessibility that range from time, travel, availability of substitute teachers, and access to

teachers in specific content areas (Bell-Robertson, 2015; Bitz, 2013; Broadley, 2012). Bell-Robertson (2015) explained that in many rural districts, there is only one music teacher, and proposed that virtual and online professional learning and support would provide important opportunities for collaboration and learning that would not otherwise be possible. Likewise, Broadley (2012) championed the potential of technology to increase accessibility of professional learning to rural teachers, while also acknowledging the importance of fostering a sense of community within virtual learning opportunities. Indeed, professional learning that is exclusively online can increase isolation, reduce relevance for some teachers, and cause frustrations related to technology issues (Bitz, 2013; Hunt-Barron et al., 2015). A blend of face-to-face or synchronous online learning with asynchronous collaboration may reduce isolation and technology frustrations while still increasing accessibility to professional learning opportunities (Bitz, 2013; Broadley, 2012).

In rural settings, it is common for new teachers to have mentors who teach different content areas or grade levels. The findings from my study showed that mentors who taught different subject areas could provide vital support regarding teaching strategies, school culture, and professional learning, but some teachers reported a desire to collaborate with others in the same content area. Bell-Robertson (2015) emphasized the potential of online support for music teachers to improve classroom teaching and facilitate the development of a music teacher's identity. Rodesiler and Tripp (2012) suggested ways that experienced English teachers could support new teachers in the field using online strategies that ranged from offering support to sharing resources. Similarly,

Luft et al. (2015) explained that teachers in rural settings could benefit from online support from other science teachers.

I explored options for regional meetings in North Dakota to minimize travel distance, time commitments, and expenses. One component of North Dakota's educational framework is the North Dakota Regional Education Association (NDREA), which consists of eight associations located across the state (NDREA, 2018). These associations provide a variety of services and support to public schools in North Dakota (NDREA, 2018). Broadly (2012) proposed the benefits of professional learning "across boundaries of districts" (p. 100) as part of professional learning that would also include in school support and online learning. For new teachers in rural schools, a study focused on professional learning for new superintendents in rural Kansas schools showed that this approach has the potential to meet the needs of rural educators (Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Participants in a leadership program that included a regional meeting as well as mentoring and statewide seminars rated all components of the program as valuable (Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Using these findings, I developed a blended learning opportunity that includes a series of three 1-day sessions along with optional online collaboration over the course of the school year. Although I designed the sessions to take place in person, a presenter could modify the format and deliver the presentations online through webinars if distance, time, or expenses prohibited travel outside of the school setting.

Relevance. A resounding message among articles discussing professional learning for new teachers was that there must be a mechanism for differentiation and

personalization to provide meaningful learning (Broadley, 2012; Huling, Resta, & Yeargain, 2012; Wallace, 2014; White & Kline, 2012). Adoniou (2016) stressed the need to understand the “specific teaching contexts and the teaching identities of beginning teachers” (p. 357) when planning effective professional learning. While this might be a tall order for a series of 3 days of professional learning, an environment where teachers have the opportunity to describe their contexts, focus on selected aspects of their practice, and explore their identities may lead to rich and meaningful conversations (see Adoniou, 2016).

It is unlikely that a diverse group of teachers will find relevance in a workshop filled with facts or information because the information that is useful to one teacher may not be pertinent to another (Adoniou, 2016). On the other hand, access to resources and opportunities for sharing of information that is meaningful to particular groups of teachers may be valuable. Based on this information, I designed sessions to include access to resources and content-specific discussions and support. The format of the three sessions includes opportunities for discussion and small group work to help the teachers traverse the experiences of first-year teaching as they explore what, how, and why they are enacting their teaching repertoire (Adoniou, 2015; Clandinin et al., 2015; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). By embedding the sessions with open-ended questions and opportunities for new teachers to share their experiences, concerns, and frustrations with each other in a supportive and solution-based setting, I aimed to increase the relevance of this professional learning opportunity (Correa et al., 2015; Huling et al., 2012).

Collaboration. To support the professional learning already taking place through the mentoring relationship, I designed the sessions and online components to emphasize collaboration through professional discourse. I used components of the mentoring program as a basis for conversation topics during each session. Through these discussions, teachers will have opportunities to explore their developing identity and teaching effectiveness as well as the other experiences such as balancing personal and professional life, working in a rural setting, and their role in the NDTSS mentoring relationship (see Ambriosetti, 2011; Clandinin et al., 2015; Morrison, 2013). After analyzing interview transcripts of 40 early career teachers in rural and urban Alberta schools, Clandinin et al. (2015) outlined the complex interactions of personal and professional tensions that influenced the teachers' experiences and professional identities. Clandinin et al. asked whether new teachers might find important support and encouragement through collaboration with the development of "safe spaces" (p. 13) that would "allow them to attend carefully to ways they can move toward reimagining identities that sustain them in and across the personal and school contexts" (p. 13). Furthermore, Broadly (2012) explained that over 80% of 104 survey respondents considered collaborative professional learning to be an important component of their professional development. Broadley explained that online options can reduce the struggles of meeting as a professional community of teachers across rural school districts, but stressed that the focus of learning must be pertinent to their classroom setting.

Discussion topics during the first session of my proposed project will focus on working with a mentor. Ambriosetti (2011) acknowledged that there is limited research

about the role that new teachers play in the mentoring relationship. However, Ambriosetti explained that new teachers understand that one of their responsibilities in the mentoring relationship is to utilize the feedback they receive from the mentor. Adoniou (2016) also noted that at times, new teachers craved actionable feedback about their practice rather than praise that did not feel deserved. Conversations focused on classroom practice that “confront and contest ideas” (Adoniou, 2016, p. 359) are consistent with what many new teachers experienced in their preservice education. I included discussion topics related to soliciting and acting on the mentor’s feedback to help participants consider their role in the mentoring partnership during the first session related to anticipation.

The second session of the project will resume the topic of working with a mentor and also address issues related to Moir’s (1999) description of the survival phase of first-year teaching. Clandinin et al. (2015) said that teachers appreciated opportunities to discuss difficulties balancing the requirements of teaching with responsibilities of their personal lives and how to take care of themselves. These topics relate closely to the survival phase described by Moir (1999). Clandinin et al. proposed that providing new teachers opportunities to share their stories as they work through challenges of first-year teaching in a safe and supportive environment might help them strengthen their teaching identity and desire to continue teaching. Support and opportunities for connection can be particularly valuable for new teachers in rural settings, and focusing discussions on the experiences of rural teaching can help teachers work through struggles and appreciate benefits (Morrison, 2013). The third session will provide opportunities for teachers to explore how to move from Moir’s phase of disillusionment to anticipation. Teachers will

also discuss plans for how they can continue to develop their teaching repertoire and find ways to contribute to the teaching profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Summary

Adoniou (2016) said, “Beginning teachers must be reminded of the teacher they want to become, and be supported in that journey” (p. 359). A review of the literature guided me to develop a professional development project aimed at providing support and guidance along the journey of becoming an effective teacher. Opportunities for professional discourse focused on enacting a beginning repertoire while developing teaching identity in a safe and supportive environment can help to sustain teachers through their first year of teaching (Clandinin et al., 2015). The sessions and associated online supports that I incorporated into the project will provide an opportunity for first-year teachers in the NDTSS program to work with each other and to access other supports that are pertinent to their teaching context.

I focused my review of the literature on professional learning for new teachers, the development of teacher identity, and the delivery of professional learning, and I found support for the design of a professional development opportunity for new teachers in the NDTSS program. Just as the underlying focus on mentoring and rural teaching led to some overlap as I searched for articles, I discovered connections between professional learning, teaching identity, and format delivery in the articles that I reviewed. I found that professional learning formats, which balance autonomy and support can offer teachers guidance as they develop their professional identity. I used the findings of my literature review to develop a professional development project aimed supporting new teachers to

understand and strengthen their first year of teaching and their role in the mentoring relationship.

Project Description

I have organized this project as a 3-day professional learning experience for first-year teachers employed in rural school districts that are participating in the NDTSS mentoring program. I used the findings of my study and literature review to identify five goals for this project before I developed the activities or evaluation tools (see Gusky, 2014). The goals for the new teachers participating in the project are as follows:

1. Teachers will develop a professional relationship with one or more teachers in a similar content area or grade level.
2. Teachers will describe at least one way that they have used the skills and information gained through the seminar to strengthen their role in the mentoring process.
3. Teachers will describe at least one way that they have learned to cope effectively with one or more challenges of rural teaching.
4. Teachers will report on the process and results of using one or more seminar resources focused on a selected aspect of their teaching practice.
5. Teachers will use reflection and discussion to increase their understanding of their developing teacher identity.

I aligned the goals of this project to the purpose of this study, which was to increase the understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of NDTSS participants in rural schools. This project is aimed to move beyond understanding to

improving the experiences and developing effectiveness of new teachers in rural schools. Each 1-day session will be guided by a PowerPoint presentation that will lead a facilitator and participating teachers through discussions and activities aimed at understanding, supporting, and strengthening their first-year teaching experiences in the mentoring program. In addition to the PowerPoint presentations for each day, I prepared presentation notes with all support materials required to carry out the activities for each day (see Appendix A). Finally, I included opportunities for individualization to increase the likelihood that teachers will find the learning opportunities to be meaningful to their teaching situations.

Overview of the Professional Learning Sequence

I designed this professional development project so that it can be offered in regions across the state. This design has the potential to reduce traveling stresses and increase collaboration across districts but within geographic areas. Although there is room for flexibility, I designed the sessions to be presented at least a month apart with the first session taking place in the early fall. With this timeline, discussions about the phases of first-year teaching and working with a mentor will come early enough to be useful when the teachers return to their schools but extended enough that the teachers will have time to reflect on the information between each session. The first session is aimed at helping teachers establish a network and understand that the requirements of the mentoring program are focused on supporting their progress through the first year. The goal of the middle session is to help teachers continue to build an understanding of the experiences of first-year teaching and work effectively with their mentors through the

process. The last session is focused on reaching out, and teachers will be encouraged to think about their continued professional growth. I organized each of the full-day sessions with a similar format, but the topics will change to reflect the changes the teachers are likely to encounter as they proceed through the school year.

Teachers will spend the mornings of each session building, strengthening and maintaining connections, learning about first-year teaching, and working with a mentor. Each afternoon, teachers will participate in a guided activity to focus on one aspect of their teaching. I designed the afternoon activities so that teachers can collaborate and support each other in their work. The concluding activity for each session will focus on using reflection to build, or at least understand their teacher identity. Each session will include discussions focused on student learning and teaching practices. These discussions are intended to increase the likelihood that the teachers will use what they learn to strengthen their classroom practice (see Correa et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013). Using the same reasoning, I incorporated discussion topics focused on working with a mentor in each session, so teachers will be more likely to follow through with ideas that they explore during each session with their mentors. During the first session, teachers will focus on teaching in a rural school and carrying out constructive conversations with their mentors during conferences. During the second session, teachers will explore the causes, results, and supports that relate to the survival phase of teaching (see Moir, 1999). Teachers will also discuss the types of supports that can accompany the mentoring partnership and how to maximize benefits of the required teacher observations that are part of the mentoring program (see Boogren, 2015). The third session will allow teachers

to explore the first-year phases of disillusionment, anticipation, and reflection (see Moir, 1999).

Providing choices for new teachers who are pursuing professional learning acknowledges that beyond the shared experiences of first-year teaching, the participants have unique learning needs (Luft et al., 2015). To incorporate opportunities for choice, I built time into the afternoon schedules for teachers to focus on one facet of their teaching that is important to them within their teaching context. During each session, teachers will be encouraged to work with at least one other teacher who shares a common aspect of teaching to explore resources and work on components of their teaching practice that they can use upon the return to their schools. During this time of individualization, there will also be supports to guide the teachers. During the first session, teachers will explore content-specific resources. In this way, teachers will have the opportunity to build their teaching repertoire and resources while collaborating with teachers in the same content area or grade level (see Bell-Robertson, 2015; Bitz, 2013; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). During the second session, the teachers will work on a specific component of their teaching practice that they can use in their classroom before the third session. Again, teachers will be encouraged to collaborate and share resources. They will also be asked to explain how their work will lead to improved student learning in their classroom. During the third session, teachers will collaborate to focus on one aspect of teaching from the evaluation rubric used by their school. I framed this work session with the idea that evaluation rubrics can serve as a tool to guide growth (see Boogren, 2015).

Each session will conclude with an activity that involves reflection to help teachers understand their developing teacher identities. The first session will introduce the idea of teacher identity by asking teachers to write about the teacher they aspire to be and then to discuss the disparity that can arise when things do not go as planned (see Clandinin et al., 2015). The second session will provide a chance for teachers to discuss the benefits of reflection and how it can help them move through difficult times of teaching and clarify their identity as a teacher (see Clandinin et al., 2015). The third session will end with the reminder that teachers can chart the course to align their teaching experience and identity.

Timeline. This section includes an overview and schedule for organizing and implementing the First-Year Teaching on the Prairie seminar, which consists of three separate sessions.

Preparation for Seminar.

At least 4 months before the first session:

- Notify mentoring coordinator and other support organizations about the seminar.
- Seek support, funding, and guidance regarding seminar site, dates, lunch, and best methods to contact potential participants.
- Secure dates and location for the seminar.

At least 3 months before the first session:

- Send out an initial notice to all potential participants with the session dates, location, description of activities, and contact information.

- Repeat notification protocol as is appropriate to make sure that all potential participants are aware of the opportunity.

At least 1 month before the first session:

- Set up a course webpage where participants will have access to materials from each seminar. The website must also have a link to an online discussion tool so that participants can collaborate between sessions and after the completion of the seminar.
- Verify logistics regarding location, food, and materials needed for each session.

Preparation for Each Session.

At least 2 weeks before each session:

- Send a letter to participants (see Appendix A for letters) with updates and information for the session.
- Finalize lunch: At least two weeks before each session, assure that lunches and snacks will be available and appropriate for the participants.
- Upload necessary resources to the course website.
- Copy required materials.
- Prepare other resources for each session (see Appendix A for details).
- Use information about teachers to plan grouping and supports that will be needed for appropriate content areas and grade levels of participants.
- After the first session, use information from each survey (see Appendix A) to make modifications that will better meet the needs of the participants.

Timelines for Each Session.

Session 1: Making Connections and Building Understanding

- 8:00 – 9:15 Getting started and introduction
- 9:15 – 10:30 Working with a mentor
- Responding to feedback with a growth mindset
- Getting the most out of the conferences
- 10:30 – 11:15 First-year teaching in a rural school
- Benefits and struggles of rural teaching
- 11:15 – 11:45 Exploring supports and resources for new teachers
- 11:45 – 1:00 Working lunch
- Share and discuss first-year teacher resources
- 1:00 – 2:30 Time to work: Focus on one aspect of teaching context within content or grade level
- 2:30 – 3:00 Hopes and dreams and your teaching identity
- 3:00 – 3:30 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

Session 2: Moving Along

- 8:00 – 8:45 Introductions and catching up
- 8:45 – 10:30 Phases of first-year teaching
- Overview and focus on survival
- 10:30 – 11:45 Working with a mentor
- Types of mentoring support
- Seeking support

Targeting areas of support when observing other teachers

11:45 – 12:45 Working lunch

Mentoring video and discussion

12:45 – 2:30 Time to work

Collaboration and focus on one aspect of teaching practice

2:30 – 3:00 Using reflection and developing your teaching identity

3:00 – 3:30 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

Session 3: Reaching Out and Moving Forward

8:30 – 8:45 Introductions and catching up

8:45 – 9:45 Phases of first-year teaching with focus on disillusionment, rejuvenation, and anticipation

9:45 – 10:30 Working with a mentor

Thinking about the evaluation rubric as a guide for growth

10:30 – 11:45 Exploring supports that fit your needs

“Breadcrumb trail” -- Explore resources on the teaching channel website

11:45 – 1:15 Working lunch

What was learned during previous activity?

1:15 – 3:00 Time to Work

Collaboration and focus on teaching practice related to one aspect
Of evaluation rubric with the goal of improving practice

3:00 – 3:30 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

Resources, Supports, and Potential Barriers

The intent of this project is not to provide abundant information about teaching because the NDTSS program already includes that information as part of the mentoring process. Therefore, resources will be minimal. What will be crucial to the success of this professional development project is preparation so that the new teachers will quickly realize that this opportunity to learn with other new teachers is worth the precious time that they are investing. Barriers to the success of this project lay mostly in the busy schedules of the potential participants and the possibility that they will not see the value in dedicating 3 days to professional learning away from their classroom and district. I have developed this project to respect the schedules of the teachers and to delegate time during each session for teachers to work on a project of their choosing.

Resources and supports. The resources for this project include a PowerPoint presentation and supporting materials for each session and a website that will be constructed for each regional learning experience. I developed a PowerPoint presentation and presenter notes for each day. The presentation includes learning objectives, guiding questions, information, and instructions needed for each activity. I incorporated photographs of rural settings that show a transition from early to late growing seasons into the presentation. I included these photographs as a metaphor for the participants' professional growth as well as a reminder of the beauty of their rural setting. Unless otherwise noted in the presentations, the photographs are my own. The central component of each session is professional discussion and collaboration. During each session, the

presenter will distribute guides and resources for teachers to use as they work through the activities.

Before each of the sessions, the facilitator will send a letter to the teachers with updates and requests for information that will facilitate preparation and differentiation for the participants. Before the first session, the facilitator will welcome the teachers and invite them to suggest topics or concerns that they would like to explore during the next session. Before the second session, the facilitator will ask teachers to plan on one area of focus they will work on during the afternoon session. The facilitator will provide examples of areas of focus such as preparing for a substitute teacher, researching classroom design ideas, outlining a unit, developing a common assessment with another teacher, differentiating existing lesson plans, or planning for parent-teacher conferences. Before the third session, the facilitator will ask the facilitators to bring a copy of the evaluation rubric their school uses.

In addition to the resources presented during each session, the presenter will construct a website for each regional training. The website will include a page for each teacher to design and share individual information. Also, the website will also include all resources shared during each session as well as information, insights, and ideas shared during each session. Access to a discussion board for teachers to continue conversations seek assistance, and share resources will be available on the website and allow teachers to stay in touch and continue their collaboration (see Bitz, 2013; Broadley, 2012). The website, combined with the face-to-face sessions may also help to reduce the isolation that teachers may experience in rural teaching contexts (see Bitz, 2013; Broadley, 2012).

Barriers and solutions to barriers. Based on the results of this study, the barrier that looms largest for this project centers on the lack of time that teachers will have to participate in additional professional learning opportunities. Another potential barrier is a lack of perceived usefulness by new teachers and scheduling conflicts. As I have mentioned previously, the analysis of interview transcripts and conference logs revealed that the teachers in this case study were already struggling to find the time to meet the requirements of their teaching, extracurricular, mentoring, and personal experiences. Finding three more days to participate in this project would likely be challenging for most teachers. Because this project is not required by the mentoring program or district, the new teachers might not perceive it as useful enough to pursue. With these barriers in mind, I attempted to incorporate solutions into the professional learning design.

There will not be any required work between sessions to reduce the barrier of additional time requirements. The website will be available for teachers to access resources and collaborate with each other, but only on a voluntary basis to reduce isolation and support ongoing professional learning between teachers from different schools (see Broadly, 2012). To prevent asking the teachers to miss school so they can attend this learning experience, the option of scheduling the sessions on Saturdays may be appealing to the participants, and by offering the sessions regionally, travel distances will be minimal so teachers will not have to find lodging overnight. I suggest that the facilitator plan to provide snacks and a noon meal. By concluding each session at 3:30, teachers can return home before dark. Perhaps the most daunting barrier is the potential that teachers will not perceive the professional learning opportunity to be relevant to their

teaching practice. With the hope of minimizing this barrier, the NDTSS coordinator could share information about the project with mentors during the mentor trainings. This solution may also inform the mentors about some of the topics of the project to increase understanding and collaboration between mentors and teachers who attend.

Roles and Responsibilities

I designed this project with the intention of carrying out the sessions myself, but it would also be possible for other facilitators to present the information using the prepared materials and notes. The two main roles of this project include facilitator and participants. The facilitator should be someone with teaching experience who has also participated in the mentoring program in some way. The responsibilities of the facilitator will include contacting the participants before each session, setting up the website, updating the website with resources for each session, preparing materials for each session, and facilitating each session. It would certainly be reasonable for the facilitator to include additional facilitators if the demand or enrollment numbers are high. The responsibilities of the participants would be to attend each session, participate in the activities, and follow the norms established at the beginning of each session.

Project Evaluation Plan

I incorporated several levels of evaluation into this project in the form of formative and summative evaluations that will inform decisions needed to meet the needs of the participants during each session. I prepared summative evaluations to learn the extent to which participants use the information covered during the session in their teaching practice and to gain insight on how the sessions can be improved from one

offering to the next. Gusky (2014) reviewed “five crucial levels of evidence to consider when evaluating professional development activities” (p. 11). The levels that apply to my project include “participants’ reactions to the activities, participants’ learning of new knowledge and skills, participants’ use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes” (p. 11). Gusky stressed planning how to evaluate the effectiveness of that design.

Description of Evaluation Plan

During the first session, when establishing norms, the facilitator will invite teachers to provide feedback to determine whether there are slight changes in format or content that can better meet their needs. In addition, the discussions that take place throughout each of the sessions will serve as formative assessments that will allow the facilitator to make minor adjustments that will make the discussions, activities, and work times more relevant and timely for the teachers. At the end of each session, each teacher will have time to complete a survey requesting responses on a Likert scale as well as open-ended questions inquiring about the most and least useful components of the session and suggestions for the future (see Appendix A). The results from the surveys and formative assessments during each session will allow the facilitator to gauge the teachers’ responses to the information and activities of each session as well as the extent to which they feel they are learning and using the information covered during each session (see Gusky, 2014). Responses to all of the questions will help the facilitator determine whether the goals of the professional development project were met. I included the surveys in the presenter notes for each session (see Appendix A).

Rationale for Evaluation Plan

This evaluation plan will provide information to improve the session each time, and it will provide data regarding the extent to which teachers are using the components of the professional learning in their practice. An advantage to this plan is that it will not take much time for the teachers to complete the surveys. In addition, as teachers are working through their first year, they are already experiencing high-stakes evaluations carried out by their principal. Because this project is intended to provide support and encouragement for the new teachers, I wanted to include an evaluation that would guide improvements without putting additional stresses on the participants in terms of time or content. However, it would be feasible to include additional summative assessments that could include a follow-up survey after the teachers have returned to their classroom, a survey to mentors, or focus group or individual interviews with a random selection of participants.

Goals of Evaluation Plan

The evaluation goals match the overall goals of this professional development project as follows:

1. Determine whether teachers develop a professional relationship with one or more teachers in a similar content area or grade level.
2. Determine whether teachers use skills and information to strengthen their role in the mentoring process.
3. Determine whether teachers increase their understanding of the experiences of first-year teaching in a rural setting and use that understanding to effectively

cope with challenges.

4. Determine whether teachers feel that protected time to use resources and support to focus on a selected aspect of their teaching practice is beneficial.
5. Determine whether teachers increase their understanding of their developing teacher identity.

The Likert scale portions of each end-of-session survey (see Appendix A) will inform the identified evaluation goals. The open-ended questions and discussions during the sessions will provide insight into the extent to which the goals are being met. The evaluation plan will allow the facilitator to seek deeper insight into the evaluation goals to determine how much the teachers are collaborating with each other, how deeply the mentoring relationship is strengthened, and how helpful the teachers find learning about the phases of first-year teaching. I also wrote the surveys to gain insight regarding the extent to which provided protected time for guided work is useful to the teachers and whether or not the teachers perceived the information about teacher identity as useful or meaningful.

If the results of the surveys combined with the formative feedback do not yield sufficient feedback to meet the evaluation goals, I will modify the evaluation tools. One option for modification would be to add targeted open-ended questions to the end of session evaluations that more closely reflect the evaluation goals. I could also add short answer questions to gain more quantitative data relating to each goal. Although such modifications may be necessary, it is also likely that the current surveys will provide

enough information to meet the evaluation goals without adding extra work for the participating teachers.

Description of Stakeholders

At first glance, it seems that the only stakeholders in this project will be the first-year teachers participating in the sessions. There are at least four other potential groups with a stake in the results of this project. The stakeholder groups, listed from most to least direct contact, include the new teachers, their mentors, the NDTSS coordinator, school administrators, and students. The new teachers who participate in the training are the primary stakeholder group, and they will be the only respondents to the evaluation tools. The mentors will not participate in the sessions or evaluation tools, but they hold a stake in the project because of their interactions with the new teachers. The NDTSS coordinator works primarily with the mentors across the state and will be the first person I contact when planning the implementation of this project. Although the administrators will not be directly involved, they hold a stake in all teacher professional development opportunities. While I will not measure student learning as a part of this project, students will be a primary focus of the professional learning that occurs during each session and responses about student learning will be important components of all evaluations.

Project Implications

Previous research has already established that mentoring programs strengthen teaching and increase the retention of new teachers. I aimed the goals of this project at providing additional supports to teachers who are in the mentoring program to bolster their understanding and contributions to the mentoring program while also helping them

understand some of the expected challenges of first-year teaching. There are several implications for social change that can result from a successful outcome of this project that can benefit the new teachers, their mentors, their students, and the mentoring program.

Importance of Project to Local Stakeholders

The overarching goal of this professional development project is to strengthen the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural schools. Providing supports for new teachers can reduce attrition and increase the likelihood of improved effectiveness (Potemski & Matlach, 2014). Since teachers are vital to the experiences and achievement of students, it is prudent to do everything possible to support new teachers in ways that will lead to improved student learning (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Remembering that new teachers in rural schools are likely to have unique needs and improvements, this project, which I designed for rural teachers can build collaboration, understanding, and perhaps, appreciation for their unique teaching situations (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). This project is important to local stakeholders because it provides strategies to support teachers in ways that might lead to improved teaching and learning in rural North Dakota classrooms.

If the goals of this project are realized and if the evaluation results point to improved experiences of the new teachers, this project holds the potential to benefit new teachers as well as their mentors and students. The benefits to the new teachers range from increased collaboration and professional development, improved communication skills, and a stronger understanding of the experiences of first-year teaching. Mentors

stand to benefit from the results of this project because new teachers will have the opportunities to strengthen their skills and understanding about their role in the mentoring relationship. These increased skills may lead to more effective and productive conferences, observations, and overall collaboration between the mentors and new teachers. Students also stand to benefit from their teachers' participation in the project for at least two reasons. By learning about the expected phases of first-year teaching, teachers might develop effective coping skills that will nudge them toward the phases of rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation. In addition, since teachers will have time to work on selected aspects of their teaching, they may build their repertoire and increase their understanding of how to teach concepts more effectively.

The NDTSS mentoring program may also benefit from the results of this project. The NDTSS program is focused on supporting new teachers on their journey to increased effectiveness in the classroom. This project may be a resource the coordinator can recommend to participants in addition to other voluntary regional trainings that are also available for teachers starting their career in North Dakota. Finally, by improving the experiences of new teachers in North Dakota, particularly in rural schools, perhaps more teachers will develop an appreciation and affinity for their setting as they develop their effectiveness and stay in their rural school.

Importance of Project in a Larger Context

If the evaluation of this project yields positive results, components of the project could be used in other settings, and facilitators could modify the project format to fit the contexts of their audience. Because the emphasis of the project is on increasing the

understanding of the first-year teaching experience and working effectively with a mentor, the project could be modified for particular school districts, geographic settings, or other contexts.

This project may provide important components for consideration in terms of developing induction programs with multiple supports for new teachers. This project encourages teachers to be active in their professional learning. New teachers likely have ideas for professional learning that will support them in immediate and relevant ways. Not only does this project give teachers choice in the selection of some parts of their professional learning, but the design is also intended to empower teachers to consider the ways they can contribute to their partnership with their mentor and colleagues. New teachers bring a wealth of new ideas, skills, and strategies to their teaching profession (Correa et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013; Zhang, 2014). I developed this project with an appreciation of the strengths new teachers bring to the profession while respecting the challenges they face as they make the transition from novice to accomplished teachers. By incorporating an online framework for collaboration as well as time for the new teachers to build and strengthen their repertoire, it is possible that this project can serve as a starting point for developing similar courses.

Conclusion

The focus of this project is different from many professional learning opportunities for new teachers because it allows teachers to pause and build an understanding of their experiences as new teachers. I based this project on the assumption that teachers are entering their career with a basic teaching repertoire and a strong desire

to teach (see Feiman-Nemser, 2001). I developed activities to meet the goals of the course that would support teachers as they increase their repertoire, build their teacher identity, and strengthen their professional connections. The project is intended to be one small component of a collection of supports for new teachers who are important beyond measure to the students of North Dakota.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Moving through the process of proposing a study, recruiting participants, collecting and analyzing data, and developing a project for this study, resembled a journey filled with discoveries and opportunities for further investigation. As I reflected on the discoveries and questions revealed during my research, I returned to the writings of John Dewey, which I used to build the conceptual framework of this study. Dewey (1938) said that what a person “has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (p. 44). As I proceeded from one step to the next during this study, I found Dewey’s words to be accurate not only because the work and discoveries from one step guided the next, but also because the findings pointed to opportunities for further study. In this section, I will reflect on the strengths, limitations, and implications of this project study as well as the potential for further research related to first-year teaching and mentoring in rural schools.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I cannot accurately address all of the strengths and limitations of the project I designed until I have implemented and evaluated it. Nevertheless, by reflecting on the development and components of the project, I have identified promising strengths and a few limitations that are worth consideration. Although there are opportunities for new teachers to participate in professional learning targeted for new teachers in the state, I am not aware of other offerings that focus on the mentoring relationship. The unique approach of this project presents the possibility of both strengths and limitations. It is

possible that this project could offer important supports to new teachers in North Dakota that are not supplied by other professional learning opportunities. The possibility also exists, however, that new teachers will not have the time to pursue an additional opportunity for professional learning or that they will not find the seminar useful. Based on my literature review and the analysis of the findings of my study, however, the content and design of this project merit implementation and evaluation.

Strengths

An underlying strength of this project is that it is consistent with the andragogical framework of this study. Throughout each session of the project, the teachers will have multiple opportunities to reflect on their experiences so they can select topics that are relevant and timely to their teaching responsibility (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015; Knowles et al., 2015; Steeg & Lambson, 2015). This andragogical design is also consistent with an approach to professional development that builds “teacher agency” (Calvert, 2016, p. 4). Calvert (2016) explained that “teacher agency is the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues” (p. 4). While this 3-day project falls far short of the system-wide work of building teacher agency, it can provide an introduction for teachers to see that they have a crucial role in the development of their classroom practice, mentoring partnership, and professional contributions. Based on the findings of my study, several teachers noted their appreciated the autonomy related to teaching in a rural school. A strength of this project lies in its design, which charges participants with the responsibility of selecting areas of focus that fit their needs and interests (see Calvert,

2016). Other components of this project that are consistent with building teacher agency include ongoing professional interactions based on shared experiences and interests, a focus on growth, and clear learning objectives (see Calvert, 2016).

Another strength of the project is that it aligns with the NDTSS mentoring framework so that teachers are not being asked to learn new practices as much as they are being invited to consider the ways that they can contribute to the mentoring process to enhance their experiences and teaching effectiveness. This project also incorporates and encourages professional discourse, which can support effective classroom practices (see Thompson et al., 2013). The project website, which will extend learning between and beyond sessions as well as encourage collaboration between the participants, provides another layer of support in addition to those provided by the mentoring program.

The first year of teaching presents a multitude of requirements and responsibilities that can feel overwhelming and burdensome (Simos, 2013). I have prepared a professional learning opportunity for new teachers intended to offer opportunities to explore and discuss aspects of teaching that are pertinent to their practice. In addition, I designed the project so that teachers can celebrate their career choice while they build an understanding of their developing teacher identity. Every interview participant in my study recommended participation in the mentoring program. The strengths of this project reflect the strengths of the mentoring program and provide additional tools and supports for teachers in rural North Dakota schools.

Limitations

One limitation of this project relates to the busy schedules of the proposed

participants for this project. A report published by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) identified lack of time as the primary barrier to providing effective professional development opportunities for teachers. The results of my study revealed that some teachers were overwhelmed with their current responsibilities, and it is possible that they will not consider a professional development opportunity that is not a teaching or mentoring program requirement. Hunt-Barron et al. (2015) acknowledged that for many teachers, “professional development is seen as one more activity added to a teacher’s ever-growing list of things to do, rather than as an opportunity for enrichment” (p. 11). If teachers do not see this project as something that can be useful to them, they can easily dismiss it before considering the possibility that participation may provide them with tools to deal with the challenges of their first year.

Delivery of the seminar at multiple regions around the state presents another possible limitation. While offering multiple seminars to small groups of teachers in the same region will increase convenience for the teachers, there is a risk that the small groups of teachers would prevent collaboration within content areas and grade levels. The most significant limitation of this project is that it is new in content and design; therefore, until it is evaluated, the potential benefits to the new teachers are only hypothetical.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A review of the limitations of this project afforded me the opportunity to consider alternative approaches to the project. To address the limitations of the project that are related to time constraints, the possibility of low enrollment numbers, and scheduling conflicts, an alternative approach would be to offer an online form of the project. An

online format would allow all new teachers across the state to participate asynchronously so they could work at their convenience while still collaborating with other teachers through a discussion board. Digital professional learning opportunities can be an effective means to reduce geographic barriers and encourage collaboration in rural settings (Hunt-Barron et al., 2015). Like other forms of professional development, however, teachers must perceive digital formats as meaningful and relevant and have opportunities and options for choice and focus. Opportunities for choice could remain a part of a digital design by following the presented sequence of activities for each seminar session as separate modules of an online offering.

While an alternative form of delivery may reduce scheduling and geographic limitations, the challenge of recruiting participants may require a different approach. One possible solution might be to invite teachers to participate in the first seminar as a pilot program. When I sought volunteers to participate in my study, only a few responded positively to my invitation. Most of those volunteers, however, participated in more than one component of my study to its completion. Hunt-Barron et al. (2015) proposed that perhaps teachers with the “highest self-efficacy are the most willing to engage in sharing their practices with others in an online space” (p. 11). Based on participation in my study, I propose that such teachers might also be willing to engage in professional learning aimed at improving their experiences and developing effectiveness. By offering the first seminar as a pilot, I could provide the participants with opportunities for increased agency by providing them with opportunities to share insights about their learning in a way that can help other teachers (see Calvert, 2016).

Offering the first seminar as a pilot course would also address the final limitation that I addressed in the previous section regarding the need for implementation and evaluation of this new professional development project. By openly conducting the first seminar as a pilot and explicitly seeking the first participants' feedback regarding the usefulness of the professional learning, I would be able to refine and modify the project design. I could also use responses from the first participants as a means to help future participants determine whether attending the seminar would strengthen their teaching to the extent that they would work it into their busy schedules.

The potential strengths of this project seem worthy of considering adaptations that would reduce limitations and increase the opportunities for new teachers to participate in the seminar. Adjusting the delivery process is one strategy that might reduce limitations for some teachers in rural settings with busy schedules. Such modifications could also include a blended approach where teachers meet face-to-face for one session but online for the remainder of the sessions. The project design lends itself to such modifications as long as there are opportunities for discussions and collaboration. Engaging a small group of enthusiastic participants may expedite the collection of evaluative data to inform modifications and revisions while providing useful information and strategies to teachers seeking opportunities to for professional learning.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

As I worked to develop this project, I relied on the skills I am developing as a scholar and researcher. I used those skills, along with the support of other scholars and scholarly literature, to make a journey that started with the identification of a problem

and ended with the development of a project that has the potential to bring about positive social change. In this section, I will use Creswell's (2012) description of educational research to guide a discussion and reflection of what I learned as I engaged in the process of scholarly research.

Scholarship

Creswell (2012) advised viewing research as a "personal journey" that "will be challenging but also exciting" (p. 1). For me, the journey required several years, but in the end, I was able to work through the six research steps identified by Creswell that started with the identification of a problem and ended with sharing the results of educational research. Through this process, I gained an understanding and appreciation of the wealth of educational research that exists in the peer-reviewed literature. As I searched the literature to gain an understanding of the problem related to the lack of understanding about new teachers in rural schools and their experiences with mentoring, I learned how to look for themes, guidance, discrepancies, gaps in understanding, and connections. I discovered that a review of the literature is a necessary starting point that does not stop until the research is completed because there are always opportunities to verify findings, research new questions, consider alternative approaches, and seek new explanations. True to Creswell's description, I discovered that the process of literature review required the development of "patience as well as knowledge about what to look for" (p. 25). As my patience and understanding of how to seek information increased, so did my persistence and fascination in the research topic I selected.

Through the process of conducting my research, I once again learned the importance of persistence and patience. My initial research plan did not coincide with the sample of participants who volunteered to participate in my study. This occurrence challenged me to seek guidance from experts in the field, revisit the literature, and revise my proposal. As I worked through this portion of my work, I gained a heightened appreciation of attending to the ethical components of research, which Creswell (2012) noted are most pertinent when collecting data and sharing results. This heightened awareness was the combined result of the guidance provided by Walden University's IRB process and the growing appreciation of the volunteers who participated in my study. From my initial communications with these participants to the analysis of the data about their experience, I was humbled by the opportunity and responsibility to interpret their responses accurately.

Creswell (2012) highlighted the "ever-present aspect of writing as a key facet of research" (p. 25). Similar to the process of the literature review, I found the writing process to be ongoing and iterative. Through successions of proofreading and responding to feedback, I continuously edited my work to be succinct but thorough (American Psychological Association, 2010). At times, I struggled to find the balance between editing and moving forward, which is when I relied heavily on feedback and guidance from my chairperson. I came to see the process of writing as the unifying component of my developing scholarship because writing connected all aspects of the research process that ultimately lead to increased understanding and the potential for positive change.

Project Development and Evaluation

When I wrote the proposal for this research study, I constructed a list of five potential projects that might connect the research problem and findings in a way that would promote positive social change. In the proposal, I emphasized that a review of the findings would be necessary before selecting a project format and perspective. My proposed ideas included training for mentors, the development of a white paper sharing my findings, and the development of resources for new teachers in rural schools. As I completed my analysis of the data, reviewed Walden's requirements for projects, and considered the original research problem, the development of a professional development project aimed at supporting new teachers in rural schools rose to the top as the best option for a project. With this approach, I was able to align the project with the conceptual framework, the research problem, and the findings of my research.

To develop the project, I relied on the same developing skills that I used during the research process. I returned to the literature to find ways to align my findings with the design of a professional learning opportunity that has the potential to offer knowledge, skills, and perspectives to new teachers in rural schools who are participating in the mentoring program. I used Creswell's (2012) analogy to "solving puzzles" (p. 25) to combine findings from my study and the literature to develop a 3-day professional development project. Similar to the process of completing a complicated puzzle, I considered each piece of the process to assemble a project that has the potential to be meaningful, feasible, and adaptable for the new teachers in my state.

A crucial aspect of the project development was to consider how to evaluate its progress and overall effectiveness. Once again, the literature provided guidance as I developed a plan for evaluation that would be informative without being burdensome to the participants. It was helpful for me to follow Gusky's (2014) suggestion to "plan backward" (p. 14). I started by identifying the learning outcomes for each portion of the professional development project. After the first implementation of the project, I will determine whether the evaluation tools were sufficient to provide evidence about whether or not the participants met the identified learning objectives.

Leadership and Change

I selected a focus on teacher leadership when I began my progress toward a doctoral degree because I want to hone my leadership skills without moving into an administrative position. The potential for teachers to serve as leaders is an emerging and exciting area of education that presents abundant opportunities to bring about positive change in teaching and learning (Cosenza, 2015). As I progressed through the doctoral coursework, collaborated with other teachers, and viewed the role of teachers from a variety of perspectives, I gained an appreciation for the many ways that I can be a teacher and a leader. The information I learned in my courses combined with my growing understanding of the need to support new teachers in rural schools in my state led me to develop a proposal for this study. It was not until I began to plan the project, however, that I deeply understood how research, leadership, and a passion for teaching and learning could coalesce into opportunities for growth and positive change. As I reflected

on these opportunities, I realized that I had instilled qualities for leadership into the design of my project.

In 2011, the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (TLEC) published the teacher leader model standards, which present seven domains outlining aspects of teacher leadership. Domain 3 focuses on “promoting professional learning for continuous improvement” (TLEC, p. 16, 2011). Components of this domain include leveraging collaboration, andragogical learning, differentiation, and the exploration of relevant topics in education as components of professional learning. I strived to instill these components into the project I developed. In turn, the new teachers who participate in the project may return to their schools with an increased awareness of their abilities to develop as teacher leaders.

The primary objective of my project was to increase the new teachers’ understanding of their first-year experience and developing effectiveness in the classroom. Another feasible outcome relates to instilling an appreciation of teacher leadership. For some teachers, opportunities to participate in leadership roles can increase teacher agency and may provide increase retention (Calvert, 2016; TLEC, 2011). By introducing and modeling skills related to teacher leadership into the development of the project, I may help new teachers consider the ways they can pursue leadership roles in their setting as they continue to learn about the teaching profession.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

My understanding of the importance of the work related to this study and project evolved and increased through the process that began with proposing the study and ended

with communicating the results and plans for the future. I started with the rationale that it was important to increase the understanding of one group of teachers. By reviewing the literature related to mentoring, first-year teaching, and teaching in rural schools, I came to appreciate how combining these topics increased the understanding of the unique and shared experiences of teachers starting their careers in rural settings. After analyzing the data, I gained an understanding of the important insights that new teachers have to share their experiences. By developing a project based on a synthesis of my research findings and literature review, I realized the need to balance professional learning with opportunities for choice. Finally, by considering opportunities to share my findings, I have been inspired by the potential for future research, which holds promise to continuously improve the support and guidance that can empower and encourage new teachers.

When I developed a rationale for this study, I described the growing need to attract and retain teachers in rural schools across North Dakota. A review of the literature echoed the challenges of first-year teaching and the potential of strong mentoring programs to increase retention and developing effectiveness. In a recent article, Stanulis and Bell (2017) emphasized that “the kind of mentoring beginning teachers experience during their first few years of teaching can make or break their desire to remain in teaching and their potential to impact student learning” (p. 59). Stanulis and Bell’s summary coincides with the purpose of my study to increase the understanding of how participation in the NDTSS mentoring program influenced the experiences and developing effectiveness of teachers. By narrowing my focus on teachers in rural settings,

I was able to give voice to a group of teachers whose experiences may coincide with others as they embark on their careers in rural schools across the state. Although my case study represented a small group of teachers, the added analysis of NDTSS survey data added depth and breadth to my findings. The stakeholders I identified in the planning phases of this study can refer to my findings to increase their understanding of the mentoring program, and the importance of providing support to new teachers in rural schools.

The findings of this study revealed the experiences of a small group of teachers who were willing and able to share aspects of the journey through their first year of teaching. I used these findings to develop a professional development project that focuses on rural teachers in mentoring programs. The focus on rural teachers validates their unique experiences and their valuable role in the schools where they are beginning their careers. This work is important because it provides insight into one group of teachers in a way that can inform stakeholders, increase understanding, and point to future research. These factors can lead to positive social change by contributing to increased teacher retention and effectiveness in rural schools in North Dakota and beyond.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The implications for positive social change related to this study centers on students and extends to each school and community. While the focus of this study is first-year teachers, their students stand to benefit from each positive change that takes place in rural classrooms across the state. As those students travel from one classroom and one academic year to the next, they contribute to their communities in myriad ways that can

often be traced back to what and how they learn in their classroom. In this section, I will highlight several specific implications for positive social change as well as recommendations for future practice and research related to this study.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Aside from the potential of improving student learning in rural classrooms, the findings of this study hold implications for positive social change at several levels. Findings from this study as well as the project have the potential to improve the understanding and experience of individual teachers as they begin their teaching career. Similarly, the study's findings and project offer insight and support to strengthen the relationships between mentors and first-year teachers. Finally, at the NDTSS level, the findings offer insights and perspectives of participants teaching in rural schools, which may provide direction for program modifications, validation for what is working well and ideas for further research to learn more about the program and participants.

The results of this study revealed the participants' strong desire to make a positive difference in the lives of their students. Even as the teachers struggled with time demands, steep learning curves, cultural differences, isolation, and exhaustion, their resilience and belief that they were doing something important rose above the concerns and frustrations of their first-year teaching experiences. As I read and reread the interview transcripts of the teachers in this bounded case, I was struck by the participants' wisdom, resilience, and enthusiasm that accompanied, and often seemed to supersede their concerns, doubts, and frustrations. I am quite certain that an important implication for positive social change lies within the teachers who choose to begin their careers in

small and rural schools especially when they have the opportunity to participate in the NDTSS mentoring program. As these new teachers continue to learn, they have much to offer regarding their beginning teaching repertoire and also their enthusiasm, belief in making a positive difference, and potential to develop into excellent teachers and leaders in their schools, communities, districts, and state.

By increasing the understanding of the experiences of this small group of teachers, the possibility exists that stakeholders at the local and state level can take measures to improve those experiences. Research points to the likelihood that when teachers find satisfaction and enjoyment in their professional setting, they are more likely to stay in the teaching career (Battle & Looney, 2014). At a time when teacher shortages plague school districts across the county, measures that might increase retention call for future research, pilot programs, and possible implementation. Such efforts may take the form of school administrators deciding to participate in the NDTSS program or policymakers providing the necessary supports for continuing and extending the NDTSS program.

The findings of this study reflect the positive change that is already implemented by the NDTSS program. Not only do the components of the NDTSS mentoring program coincide with research-based recommendations, but the participants in this study also cited many ways that working with their mentor eased the stresses of their first year and provided valuable guidance in the development of their teaching effectiveness. Nonetheless, the findings of this study provided insight that could strengthen the program, especially for teachers in rural settings. Ongoing support and increased

participation have the potential to promote positive social change by continued improvements in the experiences and effectiveness of new teachers, which may also enhance learning in the classroom, and increase teacher retention across the state.

Applications

The findings of my research point to several applications that may be beneficial to teachers starting their careers in rural North Dakota schools. These applications may influence practices associated with the NDTSS program, school districts, and local schools as well as the professional development project that I proposed in Section 3. With the recollection that the purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the experiences and developing effectiveness of rural NDTSS participants, I suggested that a review of the findings will provide insight to program coordinators, mentors, administrators, and first-year teachers that will apply to individual situations and system-wide settings. In this section, I will suggest possible applications based on the propositions that guided this study.

The first proposition addressed teaching in a rural setting. For teachers starting their careers in rural schools, the findings of my study suggest that there are unique experiences associated with rural teaching. This information may be especially useful for teachers who have not previously lived in a rural setting. Supports may include helping the new teacher to understand and appreciate the rural community, find resources, and deal with feelings of isolation. Applications to address these findings could be implemented at the mentor and administrator levels.

The second proposition addressed first-year teaching and the mentoring program.

The findings of my research showed that participation in the mentoring program was valuable to most participants in rural schools. This information may be useful for administrators who have not previously participated in the program. There is no doubt that the program requires additional time from mentors and the new teachers. However, the literature review I conducted, as well as interview transcripts I analyzed showed that the components of the NDTSS program are consistent with an intensive mentoring program focused on professional and student learning. Perhaps one application to address these findings will be realized in the implementation of the project aimed, in part, at helping first-year teachers understand and strengthen their role in the mentoring program.

The third proposition addressed andragogical learning through the mentoring program. My findings revealed the importance of relevance and motivation in professional learning. I built the proposed project on the theory of andragogy. As such, the project provides opportunities for the participants to begin their journey of professional learning through guided collaboration and the selection of topics of interest and relevance. Aside from implementation of the project, another application that addresses these findings may include seeking ways to help new teachers understand the components of the mentoring program as valuable professional learning opportunities.

The last proposition addressed the development of teaching effectiveness. The findings of my study showed evidence of increased effectiveness that varied in areas of focus. The NDTSS conference protocol already includes discussions based on teaching practices guided by evaluation rubrics. One application of these findings might include using an evaluation rubric as a measure of growth when new teachers and their mentors

who are focusing on a particular area of teaching. This is a topic of the professional learning project and may be useful to the participants in their teaching practice or mentoring relationship. At the district level, it might be useful for administrators to understand that the findings of my study showed that participants in my study reported improved teaching practices, as well as improved experiences.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study point to several areas of continued and related research. I have focused my suggestions for future research on first-year teachers in rural settings because the results of this small case study led to questions that may yield additional understanding and insight about first-year teaching and mentorship in rural schools. While there are many possible areas of future research, I have selected three areas for future research that have direct connections to my study.

A case study that includes mentors may provide additional information about the mentoring relationship, professional learning, and developing effectiveness within the mentoring program. Such research could focus on mentors as a bounded case or several pairs of mentors and new teachers. By solely focusing on mentors, findings could reveal information about their experiences as well as their perceptions of the developing effectiveness and experiences of the first-year teachers they mentor. A phenomenological study focused on pairs of mentors and first-year teachers could reveal the inner workings of the partnership throughout the year and provide valuable insight to the mentoring program coordinators.

Another area of research could compare the experiences of rural NDTSS

participants to rural nonparticipants in an experimental study. Findings of such a study may point to the shared experiences of rural teachers as well as areas of strength and opportunities for growth within the mentoring program. A related area of research might include a focus on rural administrators who participate in the program compared to those who do not participate in the program.

The effectiveness of the project proposed in this study is another potential area of future research. Quantitative analysis of the daily evaluations and the responses collected during the sessions could be used to evaluate the experiences of all participants for 1 year. These findings could inform areas of interest and concern for the participants in the learning experience. Alternatively, a case study of one group of teachers going through all three sessions of the project may provide insight into what happens during the first year of teaching as well as the benefit of professional learning targeted for first-year teachers in the mentoring program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of how participation in the NDTSS mentoring program affects the experiences and developing effectiveness of first-year teachers in rural schools. Through cooperation with the NDTSS coordinator and the willingness of a small group of first-year teachers in rural schools to participate in this case study, I collected and analyzed data to address two research questions related to rural teaching, working with a mentor, and developing teaching effectiveness. Those findings suggest that participation in the NDTSS mentoring program can improve the experiences of first-year teachers and facilitate the developing effectiveness of its

participants in rural schools. Through the analysis of combined data sources, this study promotes positive social change in several important ways. First, the findings can inform stakeholders who strive to meet the needs of rural teachers. Second, the findings present suggestions for future research focused on rural teaching, mentorship, and first-year teaching. Perhaps most important, however, are the lessons presented by the teachers in this study who started their teaching careers in rural schools with an NDTSS mentor. While the teachers encountered challenges and frustrations, they also showed evidence of determination and growth as they finished their first year with plans to begin their second. A focus on their experiences not only fosters hope, but it also calls for attention and continued efforts to understand and support new teachers who begin their career teaching on the prairie and beyond.

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Appendix A: The Project

Project Overview

Title: New Teachers on the Prairie Seminar

Purpose: Teachers will increase their understanding of the experiences of first-year teaching in a rural setting with a mentor.

Goals

1. By the end of the final session of the seminar, teachers will develop a professional relationship with one or more teachers in a similar content area or grade level.
2. By the end of the final session of the seminar, teachers will describe at least one way that they have used skills and information gained through the seminar to strengthen their role in the mentoring process.
3. By the end of the final session of the seminar, teachers will describe at least one way that they have learned to cope effectively with one or more challenges of rural teaching.
4. By the end of the final session of the seminar, teachers will report on the process and results of using one or more seminar resources focused on a selected aspect of their teaching practice.
5. By the end of the final session of the seminar, teachers will use reflection and discussion to understand their developing teacher identity.

Learning Outcomes

Session 1

1. Teachers will build connections with other new teachers who share similar experiences in terms of school setting, content areas, and/or grade levels.
2. Teachers will gain insight on how to work effectively with the mentors during conference times.
3. Teachers will discuss the benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural setting.
4. Teachers will explore tools that can enhance their teaching experiences.
5. Teachers will reflect on their developing teacher identity.

Session 2

1. Teachers will continue to build connections with colleagues.
2. Teachers will compare their first-year teaching experiences with Moir's phases of first-year teaching.
3. Teachers will identify and discuss strategies for working with their mentor.
4. Teachers will focus on one aspect of their teaching practice.
5. Teachers will reflect on the significance of reflection in their teaching practice.

Session 3

1. Teachers will continue to build connections with colleagues
2. Teachers will explore resources that are available at the state level and beyond.
3. Teachers will explore and discuss the disillusionment phase and moving through it to rejuvenation and anticipation
4. Teachers will use an evaluation rubric to write a meaningful goal for improving one aspect of their teaching practice

Target Audience: First-year teachers who are working with a mentor and employed in rural schools.

Suggested Timeline

Preparation for Seminar.

At least 4 months before the first session:

- Notify mentoring coordinator and other support organizations about the seminar.
- Seek support, funding, and guidance regarding seminar site, dates, lunch, and best methods to contact potential participants.
- Secure dates and location for the seminar.

At least 3 months before the first session:

- Send out an initial notice to all potential participants with the session dates, location, description of activities, and contact information.
- Repeat notification protocol as is appropriate to make sure that all potential participants are aware of the opportunity.

At least 1 month before the first session:

- Set up a course webpage where participants will have access to materials from each seminar. The website must also have a link to an online discussion tool so that participants can collaborate between sessions and after the completion of the seminar.
- Verify logistics regarding location, food, and materials needed for each session.

At least 2 weeks before each session:

- Send a letter to participants (included in detailed overviews for each session) with updates and information for the session.
- Finalize lunch: At least two weeks before each session, assure that lunches and snacks will be available and appropriate for the participants.
- Upload necessary resources to the course website.
- Copy required materials
- Prepare other resources for each session.
- Use information about teachers to plan grouping and supports that will be needed for appropriate content areas and grade levels of participants.

- After the first session, use information from each survey (included in detailed overviews for each session) to make modifications that will better meet the needs of the participants.

Timelines for Each Session

Detailed timelines and overviews for each session are outlined below. Each session is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. and conclude at 3:30 p.m. Working lunches are incorporated into the schedule.

Evaluation Strategy

At the end of each session, participants will complete an evaluation survey. Surveys are included at the end of the detailed overviews for each session.

Session 1: Making Connections and Building Understanding

A detailed overview of each part of the session is outlined below. Resources are inserted and shaded in gray.

Two weeks before Session 1:

1. Send a letter to all participants (pasted below) welcoming them and inviting them to send any requests of topics to include during the seminar. Inform them that a private web site for their continued interaction will be constructed and that unless they request something different, their contact information (name, school, e-mail address) will be posted.
2. Set up a private web site for the participants to contain the following:
 - a. A page for each participant with editing privileges
 - b. A resource page with links to evaluation rubrics and other links introduced during the seminar
 - c. A link to a discussion board for ongoing conversations
 - d. A page with course resources so that teachers have quick access to seminar presentations and notes collected during each session

Dear New Teacher,

This letter is to provide you with a few details about the New Teachers on the Prairie Seminar. The dates and times for each session are listed below. The contents and format of this course are based on published research about first-year teaching, rural schools, and mentoring programs as well as the findings of my dissertation focused on the experiences of first-year teachers in rural schools.

I designed this course to provide you with increased understanding about the experiences of first-year teaching and working with a mentor. In addition, during this course, you will have time to explore resources that will support your classroom practice and your work with your mentor.

My promise to you is that there will be no homework or expectations for work outside of the seminar hours. I will write a letter before each session to provide you with some things to think about, and you will have opportunities to collaborate with other participants if you choose, but there will be no required work between sessions.

I will be setting up a private webpage to include course resources, links, and opportunities to share information. I would like to include your name, school, and e-mail address. If you do not want that information shared, or if you would like me to use a different e-mail address, please let me know. This information will not be shared beyond the webpage, and the webpage will only be shared with course participants.

I wish you a great week, and I look forward to meeting you at the first session.

Sincerely,

8:00 – 9:15 Getting Started and Introductions

A. Getting Started

Overview

Slide 2: Goals for this seminar

1. Explain that each session will include information about working effectively with a mentor, teaching in a rural setting, and working to build resources and develop plans that apply specifically to each teacher's situation.
2. Explain that all course resources and notes collected during breakout sessions will be uploaded to the seminar website.
3. Review the objectives, which are listed below:
 - Meet other teachers like you who are starting their careers in rural schools.
 - Identify useful resources targeted to your content area or grade level.
 - Discuss the joys and struggles of teaching in a rural setting.
 - Discuss strategies for working with your mentor.
 - Take time for reflection.

Slide 3: Establishing norms

1. Ask for suggestions, and strive for establishing norms based on positive solutions, growth, support, and building connections.
2. Assure teachers that their suggestions and ideas are always welcome.
3. Invite feedback to serve as formative assessments that allows for immediate modifications to better meet the needs of the participants.

Slide 4: Objectives for session 1

1. Explain that the next two sessions will build on the topics that are introduced today.
2. Review the objectives, which are listed below:
 - Teachers will have the opportunity to build connections with other new teachers

who share similar experiences in terms of school setting, content areas, and/or grade levels.

- Teachers will gain insight on how to work effectively with the mentors during conference times.
- Teachers will discuss the benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural setting.
- Teachers will explore tools that can enhance their teaching experiences.
- Teachers will reflect on their developing teacher identity.

B. Introductions

Preparation:

Post the topics and questions on large pieces of paper situated around the room. Place a variety of markers by each poster.

- Poster 1: Teachers in my past
 - *Who was your most amazing teacher?*
 - *What is one thing about that teacher that you hope to exhibit in your classroom practice?*
- Poster 2: My current teaching position
 - *Where do you teach?*
 - *What do you teach?*
 - *What are your other responsibilities?*
- Poster 3: My educational journey
 - *Where did you attend high school and college?*
 - *Have you had prior rural-school experiences?*
 - *How is your current teaching situation similar to your personal experiences as a student?*
- Poster 4: Taking care of myself
 - *What do you do to take care of yourself?*
 - *What do you wish you were doing better to take care of yourself?*
- Poster 5: My typical weekday evening
 - *How do you spend the hours after school is dismissed?*
- Poster 6: Burning questions
 - *Thinking about your current teaching positions, what questions do you have right now?*

Overview

Slide 6: Introductions Part I (40 minutes)

1. Explain overall strategy
 - At least three teachers will start at each poster.
 - A change in music will serve as a signal to move to a different poster.
 - Teachers will record answers to the questions on the posters.
2. Provide time for teachers to move from one question to the next, discuss topic, and

- record information on the posters. Encourage teachers to write their names by any topics that are pertinent to their experiences.
- Use music as a signal for groups to disperse and switch every six minutes or so.

Slide 7: Introductions Part II (20 minutes)

Take time to review each poster, add information, and discuss

Slide 8: Wrap up (5 minutes)

- Explain that the posters will be up all day.
- Encourage teachers to continue to add to the topics.
- Invite teachers to start to think of connections that they have to others in this group.
- Ask the following questions:
 - With whom can you stay in touch?
 - How can you support each other?
 - What have you learned that can make your life a little easier?

9:15 – 10:30 Working with a Mentor

Objectives:

- Teachers will increase their understanding about the requirements of the NDTSS program.
- Teachers will review findings from the Teaching on the Prairie study related to participation in the program.
- Teachers will discuss strategies for getting the most from their experience in the mentoring program.

Preparation:

- Prepare “Day in the Life” copies.
- Prepare “Conversation Starter” cards.
- Have copies of conference logs.

Overview

Slides 9 – 15: Getting Started (10 minutes)

- Provide time for participants to discuss the quote: “The early years of teaching are undeniably a time of intense learning, and they are often a time of intense loneliness.” S. Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 10. Ask the following questions:
 - Does this ring true? How? Why?
 - How has participation in the mentoring program influenced these experiences for you?
- Review the NDTSS requirements and acknowledge that meeting the requirements takes time.
- Encourage teachers to look at the requirements from a perspective of growth. Explain that we will examine different components of the mentoring program each session, but the perspectives can always apply. Remember to acknowledge their work and

respect their time, but emphasize that the practices are based on research aimed at high quality mentoring.

4. Review the three components of the conference logs and facilitate discussion aimed at answering the two questions.

Slide 16: A Day in the Life (20 minutes)

1. Distribute “A Day in the Life” story (pasted below) to the participants. Have them read and quickly discuss.
2. Ask: “What seems real about this day?”
3. Discuss how the teacher and mentor might complete the conference log. (Hand out a copy of the conference log, but it is not necessary for teachers to fill it in – just discuss.

A day in the life....

- 7:00 I slept through the alarm, and now I have 45 minutes to get to school.
- 7:30 I made it out the door – I cannot remember if I fed my dog, but I know I let her out. I will come home right after school and give her some special attention. It is raining, I got mud on my pants, and I spilled my coffee, but I have my papers, and I got them all corrected last night. It will just take me a few minutes to post the grades, and I will be caught up.
- 8:00 I got to school on time, posted my grades and got to the copy machine to run off a rubric for my students. The copy machine jammed, and I had to find someone to help me. Got the papers copied, and made it to the staff meeting with one minute to spare.
- 8:30 The staff meeting ended early. On the way to my class, the principal told me that she heard from a parent who was happy with the progress Janey was making in my class. I have been trying a new reading strategy with her, and I am glad to know the parent is happy with how it is going. I wish I knew what to do about Hank – he is bored with everything I try.
- 10:30 I got through the first two hours – the students did not understand my rubric at all. I showed the rubric on my Smart Board, and tried to walk students through it, but they were not paying attention. When I just told them to get started, they were all asking questions, and I could not get to everyone. It felt like a total disaster. My second class was better – they were doing a collaborative activity that we started yesterday. With the exception of Jude, who refused to talk to anyone except the paraprofessional who was helping him, the students seemed engaged and on task. I hope I can read their work after school to make sure they are really “getting it.”
- 12:30 Lunch at last – well, I forgot my lunch at home, but, I found a can of coke and a

candy bar – I didn't have time to eat school lunch, because I had to run off my papers for the afternoon classes. I was planning to find a video to start my fifth hour class, but the Internet was down, so I will just try at the beginning of class. Sam's mom called – they are going on vacation next week. They will be gone for a week, and she would like all of his homework by tomorrow so he can get it done. I do not know what to do about that.

- 3:30 I couldn't find the video I was looking for at the beginning of my fifth hour class – while I was looking for the video, the students started playing catch with a box of crayons. The paraprofessional tried to stop them, and I felt like an idiot because I did not stop it first – I did not even know it was happening. The students finally settled down, and my planned activity was awesome – students had a set pattern to get information from other students – they were moving around, they were meeting the learning objectives, they were having fun, and everyone showed growth on the post assessment!
- 4:00 The rest of my afternoon was OK – some of the students in my 6th hour class were upset that I had not finished correcting their test. I promised I would have it done by tomorrow, and I gave them 5 minutes free time to make up for it. I know that was a mistake, but I just blurted it out, and then I felt like I needed to follow through. I overheard Mrs. Smith say that my class was really noisy. I wanted to explain that the students were doing a really cool activity that required discussion, but I was afraid I would not explain myself clearly – she kind of scares me...
- 5:00 I just got home – I totally forgot about my dog. She was so happy to see me, but I have to get started on my homework - - no time for a walk. I have to be back at school by 6:30 to sell tickets for the game, and I HAVE to finish correcting the 6th hour tests.
- 10:00 Selling the tickets was fine – Sam's mom was there, and I told her I would have all of his make up work ready for him tomorrow. I have no idea what to send home, and I have no idea how he can do "make up work" for things we have not covered yet. A bunch of students came running up to me at the game, and were talking a mile a minute telling about their plans for the project I tried to introduce with the rubric this morning. They seemed excited – maybe they did understand some of what I was explaining.
- 12:30 I finished correcting the tests, and I am mostly prepared for most of my classes tomorrow. As soon as I find the video for fifth hour, I am going to go to bed.

Slides 17 – 18: Responding to Mentor Feedback (20 minutes)

1. Show the list of "mentor comments" one by one, and facilitate a discussion about possible perceptions/responses from the perspective of the "Day in the Life" scenario.
2. Emphasize the "growth mindset" response by reminding teachers that the mentor is

- operating from the assumption that the new teachers have the capacity to accept, consider, and act on feedback in a way that will lead to continuous improvement.
3. Handout “Responding to Feedback with a Growth Mindset” reference sheets (pasted below) and review the mentor comments again – it might help to use the Day in the Life scenario for context.
 4. Brainstorm other responses that seek growth.

RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK WITH A GROWTH MINDSET

“Thanks, I’ll think about that.”

“I’m not sure if that would work. Could you help me understand what you are thinking?”

“I really appreciate that perspective, could you give me an example that you saw during your observation?”

“I’m feeling so frustrated right now. Can you help me see something positive about what happened?”

“I feel like the lesson went well, but something wasn’t quite right. Do you have suggestions for me?”

“Something about the lesson didn’t feel right, can you help me figure it out?”

“Thank you for that suggestion. I cannot quite imagine myself doing that. Can you give me an example?”

“Can I think about this and get back to you tomorrow?”

“I don’t really feel comfortable with it right now, but I promise to think about your suggestion.”

“I’m not sure I understand what you are saying. Is this what you mean?”

“I really appreciate your encouragement. Could you give me a suggestion for something specific I could do better next time?”

“Can we break the lesson down into parts and discuss each section?”

“I felt like the lesson went well, but I have questions about...”

“That’s a great question, but I’m not sure how to answer it, can you help me work through the steps?”

Slide 19: Discussion (15 minutes)

1. Ask the teachers to think back on their week.
2. Hand out “Conference Conversation Starters” resource sheet (pasted below)
3. Go through the beginning conference log prompts, and ask, “How could you clarify your responses to receive more specific feedback, guidance, and support from your mentor?”
4. Either invite the teachers to role-play actual scenarios from a recent teaching experience or discuss how to be clearer with their mentors.

CONFERENCE CONVERSATION STARTERS

What I feel good about:

One thing that I think went pretty well was ...

It wasn't perfect, but I think the students “got it” when I ...

I am really excited about ...

I spent a lot of time preparing for ...

It was just a little thing, but ...

What feels the most challenging:

One thing that completely fell apart for me this week was ...

I am really frustrated by ...

I just don't know how to respond to ...

It's just a little thing, but ...

I do not know what to say to ...

I am having trouble planning for ...

Focus for today:

I want to work on improving...

I want to figure out how to ...

I would like examples of ...

I am not sure how to talk to _____ about ...

If it doesn't seem that you are getting the feedback you think you need, come back to the topic:

I still have questions about...

I am not quite sure how to word this, but I am still worried about...

Could we go back to the topic of _____, I still am not quite sure how to handle it.

Would it be alright if I check in with you tomorrow about ...

Could I show you an example of what I am talking about?

There is room on the back to record other comments that are suggested.

Slide 20: First-Year Teaching on the Prairie Results (10 minutes)

Summarize findings from my study – all interview participants said they would

recommend other new teachers to participate in the mentoring program.

10:30 – 11:15 First-year Teaching in a Rural School

Objectives:

1. Teachers will identify benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural setting.
2. Teachers will find common ground with others.

Preparation:

1. Prepare post-it™ notes participants' school names and student enrollment. School enrollments are listed in the ND Education Directory. (<https://www.nd.gov/dpi/data/directory>).
2. Designate wall space in the room for teachers to arrange post-it™ notes during the activity.

Overview:

Slide 22: School Enrollment

1. Give participants a post-it™ note with their school name and student enrollment already recorded.
2. Have participants post school names in order from smallest to largest student enrollment on a continuum in the room.
3. Gather in groups with similar enrollment sizes.
4. Discuss staff size and distribution, diversity of students, and proximity of community members (Is this a consolidated district, or do most families live right in the community?)

Slide 23: Map of ND

1. Treat the room as a map of North Dakota, and have the participants stand in their region.
2. Have participants that are geographically connected gather in groups for the remainder of the session.

Slide 24: Distribution

1. Discuss traveling distances and ask the following questions:
 - How far do you travel to go shopping?
 - How far do you travel for professional development?
 - How far do you travel to see family?

Slide 25: Pros and Cons

1. Brainstorm pros and cons and record on post-it™ notes.
2. Arrange the notes on “Benefits” and “Challenges” posters in central locations

Slides 26 - 27: Comparisons

1. Provide an overview of research findings

2. Discuss and compare participants' experiences to research findings
3. Ask the following discussion questions:
 - What strategies help you to deal with the challenges of teaching in a rural school?
 - What supports could help you better deal with those challenges?
 - What are the positive things that you can hang on to when things are most challenging?

11:15 – 11:45 Exploring Supports and Resources

Objective:

Teachers will explore at least one new-teacher resource that could provide support for them in their teaching practice.

Preparation:

Post links to appropriate resources on the seminar website.

Overview:

Preface this part of the day with acknowledgment that in rural schools, it is common for new teachers to feel especially isolated and pressed for time. Explain that during each session, time is built into the schedule to allow teachers to add to their toolbox of resources and support that they can use when they return to their classroom. We will start with resources for new teachers, and then after lunch, we will explore some content-specific resources.

Slide 30: Resources

1. Show teachers the variety of resources on the slide
2. Give teachers 30 minutes to explore so they can discuss what they are finding over lunch.

11:45 – 1:00 Lunch and Discussion

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have find sources of validation that others who are near and far, share some similar first-year teaching experiences.
2. Teachers will have the opportunity to conduct professional conversations.

Preparation:

Provide bag lunches for participants.

Overview:

Slide 31: Working Lunch (45 minutes)

1. Encourage teachers to find a comfortable place to eat in groups – gather around a laptop, show some of the resources, find a video to watch, or just discuss findings of resources that can be helpful to them in their settings right now.

2. Ask each group to be prepared to share one useful thing they found that they will add to their toolbox.

Slide 32: Dessert (30 minutes)

1. Invite each group to share what they learned about supports for new teachers.
2. Welcome them to show what they have found and to propose additional ideas for support that would be most useful to them.

1:00 – 2:30 Collaboration and Focus on Teaching Practice

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to share what they are learning in the role of an “expert” on one topic of information or resource.
2. Teachers will have the chance to share experiences and seek resources in small groups based on teaching context.
3. Teachers will have the opportunity to conduct professional conversations.

Preparations:

1. Depending on the size of the group, be prepared to suggest various breakout conformations based on grade level and/or content areas.
2. Post links to resources on the seminar website.

Overview:

Introduce this section by acknowledging that it is common for new teachers in rural schools to be the “only one” in terms of content and/or grade level. Assure them that during each session, they will have time to focus on one aspect of their teaching in a way that is most meaningful to them.

Slide 34: We Wear Many Hats (10 minutes)

Ask teachers to stand according to the following teaching contexts (modify according to participants). Ask teachers to notice others who share common assignments/experiences because they will have the opportunity to collaborate for the next hour.

- I teach Grades K-2
- I teach Grades 3-4
- I teach Grades 5-6
- I teach Grades 7-8
- I teach Grades 9-12
- I teach multiple grades between K-6
- I teach multiple grades between K-8
- I teach multiple grades between K-12
- I teach math
- I teach science
- I teach ELA

- I teach history
- I teach technology skills
- I teach physical education
- I teach music
- I teach FACS
- I teach VoAg
- I teach social skills
- I teach time management
- I teach goal setting
- I teach reading skills
- I teach amazing students
- I teach troubled students
- I teach students on IEPs
- I teach students who are above grade level in reading proficiency
- I teach students who are frequently absent
- I teach students who love to learn
- I teach students who struggle with math
- I teach (fill in blank so everyone stands more than once).

Slide 35: Pick a Group

1. Introduce this activity by acknowledging that we all wear many hats, and it can be exhausting and exhilarating to think of all we do each day.
2. Tell the teachers that today, they have the chance to work side by side with someone who wears at least one similar hat.

Slide 36: Get to Work (1 hour)

1. Invite teachers to move around to work with someone who teaches in the same grade level or content area in at least one aspect of their teaching day.
2. Show the “Choices” slide and encourage participants to pick a focus for the next hour – Allow as much choice as possible concerning the level of collaboration and area of focus, but stress the benefits of sharing ideas, soliciting feedback, and making a plan.
3. Provide a link to the resources page (sample shown below) that will include links to resources that will support the participants.
4. Ask teachers to write their goal on a paper tent so that facilitators can circulate and provide support as needed.

Slide 37: Celebrate (20 minutes)

Invite teachers to shout out their progress and plans for using what they learned.

Example of Some Content Specific Resources

***Before distribution, update and refine depending on the content areas and grade levels of the participants.*

Science:

NSTA Resources: <http://learningcenter.nsta.org/search/>

Minot University STEM project: <https://cscluster.minotstateu.edu/>

Math:

MARS (Math Assessment Resource Service: <http://map.mathshell.org/index.php>
(For grades 6-12)

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics: <http://www.nctm.org/>

ELA:

National Council of Teachers of English: <http://www.ncte.org/>

Music:

Music Teachers National Association: <http://www.ncte.org/>

Multi-content

Smithsonian Learning Lab: <https://learninglab.si.edu/>

2:30 – 3:00 Hopes and Dreams and Your teaching identity

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to learn that developing their teacher identity is an ongoing process.
2. Teachers will have time to reflect on the teachers they can become.

Overview:

Slide 38: Teaching identity

Introduce the idea that most of us have images of the “perfect teacher” and the teacher we want to be. Those images do not always coincide with reality, and that can be frustrating and cause disillusion, or they can help us remember we can always be on the path of growth.

Slides 39 - 40: The Teacher I dream to Be

1. Invite teachers to write quietly for 10 minutes as they respond to the prompt, “*The teacher I dream to be.*”
2. Invite teachers to discuss some of the things they wrote. (10 minutes)

Slide 41: Becoming the Teacher I Dare to Be”

1. Point out the word change – from dream to dare.

2. Explain that sometimes, especially early in the teaching career, it is easy to get frustrated and disillusioned by the disparity between the day-to-day experiences and the vision of whom we dream to be as a teacher.
3. Explain that sometimes, our vision may change slightly, but the things that are most important can endure as we work to develop the skills and knowledge to become “that teacher.”
4. Encourage teachers to keep their description. Explain that we will continue to learn more about teacher identity in the next two sessions. Encourage them to be daring and persistent as they move forward to become the best teacher they can be.

3:00 – 3:30 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

Overview:

1. Give time to teachers to complete the evaluation (pasted below).
2. Thank teachers for their hard work. Encourage them to keep in touch. Facilitate sharing of resources and contact information through the development of a course-specific Google Site.
3. Let teachers know they will receive a reminder before the next session to bring something with them that they want to focus on for their teaching practice. They will have at least an hour and a half to work on this focus – individually, but with access to others for collaboration and support.

Session 1 Evaluation:

Please rate the following comments following the scale below:

- 1: strongly disagree
- 2: disagree
- 3: agree
- 4: strongly agree

1. _____ I have made connections with one or more teachers and will likely contact the, to discuss some aspect of teaching.
2. _____ I feel better prepared to carry out conversations with my mentor during our conferences.
3. _____ I will use one or more of the tools that I researched during lunch and our work time.
4. _____ This session has been a valuable use of my time.

Please answer the following questions.

5. What has been the most valuable part of this session?
6. What has been the least valuable part of this session?

7. What suggestions do you have to improve the next session?

Thank you so much for sharing your insights and ideas. Your feedback will be reviewed and seriously considered as plans for the next sessions are finalized.

PRESENTATION: SESSION 1: GETTING STARTED

New Teachers on the Prairie Seminar
Multiple Supports for NDTSS Participants in Rural Schools

DAY 1: GETTING STARTED



Slide 1

Goals for this seminar

1. Teachers will develop a professional relationship with one or more teachers in a similar content area or grade level.
2. Teachers will describe at least one way that they have used skills and information gained through the seminar to strengthen their role in the mentoring process.
3. Teachers will describe at least one way that they have learned to cope effectively with one or more challenges of rural teaching.
4. Teachers will report on the process and results of using one or more seminar resources focused on a selected aspect of their teaching practice.
5. Teachers will use reflection and discussion to increase their understand of their developing teacher identity.

Slide 2

Norms

- Building a culture of support
- Working toward positive solutions
- Celebrating progress
- Being real
- Discussing as respectful professionals

Slide 3

Objectives for the day

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to build connections with other new teachers who share similar experiences in terms of school setting, content areas, and/or grade levels.
2. Teachers will gain insight on how to work effectively with the mentors during conference times.
3. Teachers will discuss the benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural setting.
4. Teachers will explore tools that can enhance their teaching experiences.
5. Teachers will reflect on their developing teacher identity.

Slide 4



Introductions

Slide 5

Part I: Time to talk

INTRODUCTIONS

- Gather in groups of three to five
- Discuss topics as they apply to your teaching context
- Record summaries of answers
- Feel free to add your name to comments
- Move when music changes

My current teaching position
 (Where do you teach?
 What do you teach?
 What are your other responsibilities?)

**Sam Smith: Burlington 2nd grade -
 Student Council**

**Jack Johanssen: Music - Anamoose -
 K-12**

**Molly Mellin: Mathematics 7-12 -
 Lakota - Basketball and Volleyball**

Slide 6

Part II: Review

INTRODUCTIONS

- Review all posters
- Add as you wish
- Discuss briefly
- Take photos if you want to remember
- The posters will be on the walls all day, and we will record all answers and post them on the seminar website.

Slide 7

Part III: Wrap up

INTRODUCTIONS

- Continue to add to the topics
- Think about connections you have with others
- With whom can you stay in touch?
- How can you support each other?
- What have you learned that can make your life a little easier?

Slide 8



WORKING WITH A MENTOR

Mentors can “act as cothinkers and coplanners, helping new teachers reframe challenges, design and modify instruction and assessments, and analyze and promote student learning” (Sharon Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 12).

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2012). Beyond solo teaching. *Educational Leadership*. p. 12

Slide 9

Why is mentoring important?

Working with a Mentor

“The early years of teaching are undeniably a time of intense learning, and they are often a time of intense loneliness.”

-- Sharon Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 10

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2012). Beyond solo teaching. *Educational Leadership*. p. 10

Slide 10

Working with a Mentor

NDTSS requirements

- One-on-one conferences (30 hours)**
- Mentor observing new teacher (6 times)**
- New teacher observing other teachers (9 hours)**
- Recording and observing lessons (2 times)**

From the NDTSS 2016 Mentor Training Manual


Slide 11

Working with a Mentor

NDTSS requirements

How are the requirements valuable to you?

How can you enhance their worth to you?



One-on-one conferences
Mentor observing new teacher
New teacher observing other teachers
Recording and observing lessons

Different perspectives

Photo Credit: "Glasses" by Juni. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/freshfruit/6964927155>

Slide 12

Conferences		
<p>How are the requirements valuable to you?</p> <p>How can you enhance their worth to you?</p>		
Working with a Mentor	<p>Progress from last conference: <i>Recommended if you haven't already touched base on implementation of plans made during last meeting.</i></p>	
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>What I feel good about: <i>Required</i></p> </td> <td> <p>What feels the most challenging: <i>Required</i></p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>What I feel good about: <i>Required</i></p>
<p>What I feel good about: <i>Required</i></p>	<p>What feels the most challenging: <i>Required</i></p>	
	Reflect	
<p>NDTSS Conference Log Retrieved from the NDTSS New Teacher Resources at https://www.nd.gov/esp/TeacherSupport/FirstYearTeacherResources.html</p>		

Slide 13

Conferences	
<p>How are the requirements valuable to you?</p> <p>How can you enhance their worth to you?</p>	
Working with a Mentor	<p>Focus for today: <i>Required</i></p>
	<p>Identify the Domains, Components and Elements you are working with today: <i>Required</i></p>
	<p>Evidence: <i>Use if needed</i></p>
	Focus
<p>NDTSS Conference Log Retrieved from the NDTSS New Teacher Resources at https://www.nd.gov/esp/TeacherSupport/FirstYearTeacherResources.html</p>	

Slide 14

Conferences			
<p>How are the requirements valuable to you?</p> <p>How can you enhance their worth to you?</p>			
Working with a Mentor	Possible solutions: <i>Use if needed</i>		
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Teacher's next steps: <i>Required</i></td> <td>Mentor's next steps: <i>Required</i></td> </tr> </table>	Teacher's next steps: <i>Required</i>	Mentor's next steps: <i>Required</i>
	Teacher's next steps: <i>Required</i>	Mentor's next steps: <i>Required</i>	
	Resource ideas: <i>Use if needed</i>		
Next meeting date: <i>Required</i>			
	Plan		
<small>NDTSS Conference Log Retrieved from the NDTSS New Teacher Resources at https://www.nd.gov/esp/TeacherSupport/FirstYearTeacherResources.html</small>			

Slide 15



Slide 16

Working with a Mentor

Seeking and responding to feedback with a growth mindset focused on student learning

When the mentor says...

- How do you think the lesson went today?
- I am curious to know more about the reason you chose the questions you asked.
- How will you determine whether the learning objectives were met?
- Something you might try next time is ...
- I noticed the students seemed frustrated during the activity

Slide 17

Return to the opening conversations – how can you help your mentor clearly understand your week?

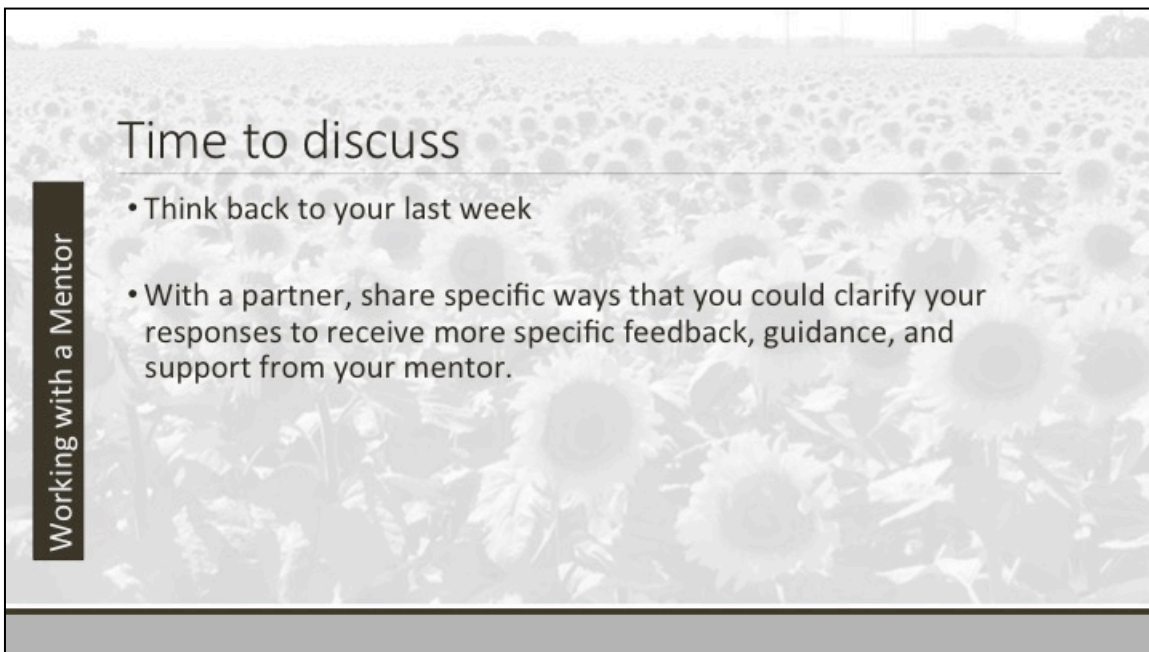
Working with a Mentor

Conferences

Progress from last conference: <i>Recommended if you haven't already touched base on implementation of plans made during last meeting.</i>		Reflect
What I feel good about: <i>Required</i>	What feels the most challenging: <i>Required</i>	
Focus for today: <i>Required</i>		

NDTSS Conference Log Retrieved from the NDTSS New Teacher Resources at <https://www.nd.gov/esp/TeacherSupport/FirstYearTeacherResources.html>

Slide 18

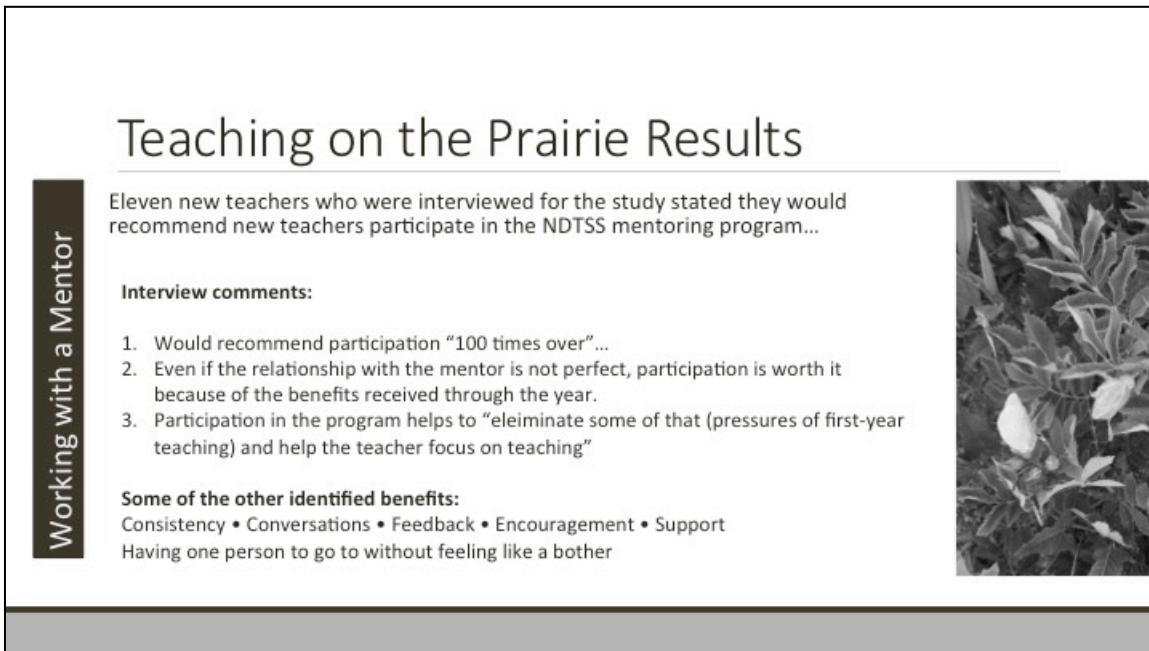


Working with a Mentor

Time to discuss

- Think back to your last week
- With a partner, share specific ways that you could clarify your responses to receive more specific feedback, guidance, and support from your mentor.

Slide 19



Working with a Mentor

Teaching on the Prairie Results


Eleven new teachers who were interviewed for the study stated they would recommend new teachers participate in the NDTSS mentoring program...

Interview comments:

1. Would recommend participation "100 times over" ...
2. Even if the relationship with the mentor is not perfect, participation is worth it because of the benefits received through the year.
3. Participation in the program helps to "eliminate some of that (pressures of first-year teaching) and help the teacher focus on teaching"

Some of the other identified benefits:

Consistency • Conversations • Feedback • Encouragement • Support
Having one person to go to without feeling like a bother



Slide 20



FIRST-YEAR TEACHING IN A RURAL SCHOOL

Slide 21

Student Enrollment Continuum

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School



Compare:

Staff Size

Staff Distribution – how many teachers per grade level and/or content area

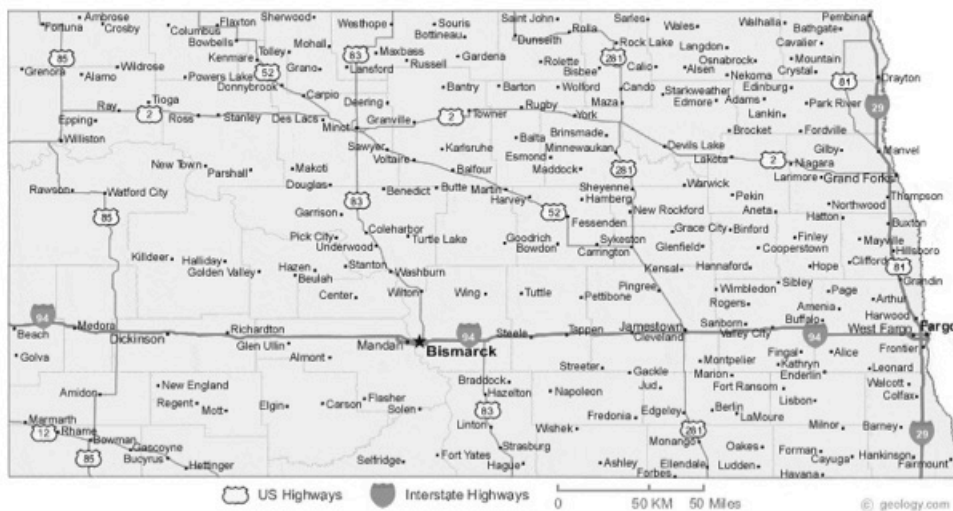
Student Diversity

Distribution of families in the district – are families spread across a wide geographical area or mostly from one community?

Slide 22

Distribution

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School



Map retrieved from geology.com at <http://geology.com/cities-map/north-dakota.shtml>

Slide 23

Distribution

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School

- How far do you travel to go shopping?
- How far do you travel for professional development?
- How far do you travel to see family?



Map retrieved from geology.com at <http://geology.com/cities-map/north-dakota.shtml>

Slide 24

Benefits and Challenges of teaching in a rural setting

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School



Slide 25

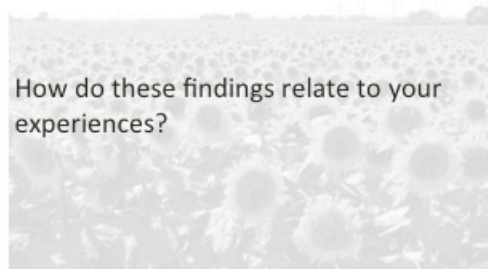
Research says many teachers experience pros and cons

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School

For example in the “First-Year Teaching on the Prairie” results, pros and cons were identified about:

- Relationships
- Class size
- Autonomy
- Ability to get involved
- Family participation
- Isolation

How do these findings relate to your experiences?



Slide 26

A large field of sunflowers stretching to the horizon under a bright sky. The sunflowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others just starting to show their heads.

First-Year Teaching in a Rural School

Discussion

- What strategies help you to deal with the challenges of teaching in a rural school?
- What supports could help you better deal with those challenges?
- What are the positive things that you can hang on to when things are most challenging?

Slide 27

A wide, flat, plowed field with distinct furrows running parallel to each other. In the distance, there is a line of trees and a small white building, possibly a farm or schoolhouse, under a clear sky.

FINDING SUPPORTS THAT FIT YOUR NEEDS RIGHT NOW

Slide 28

EXPLORING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES



Adding to your toolbox

Photo Credit: "tool box DSC_450" by el cajon yacht club. Retrieved from Flickr at https://www.flickr.com/photos/el_cajon_yacht_club/9335128135

Slide 29

Examples of Resources

Exploring Supports and Resources

- **The Teaching Channel**
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/>
- **North Dakota United Teach Forward**
<http://ndunited.org/your-work/sndu/teach-forward-ndu/>
- **Edutopia Resources Toolkit for New Teachers**
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/new-teacher-resources-toolkit>
- **National Education Association Advice and Support for New Teachers**
<http://www.nea.org/tools/for-new-teachers-articles.html>
- **Teachers First**
<http://www.teachersfirst.com>

Slide 30

Exploring Supports and Resources

TIME FOR LUNCH!

- Gather around an empty table.
- Share what you learned in your brief exploration.
- Dig deeper if you care to.
- Be ready to share what you found to be most valuable and/or to propose additional supports.




Photo Credit: "Brown Bag (without staple)" by Jeffrey Beall. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/denverjeffrey/4391650061>

Slide 31

Exploring Supports and Resources

Dessert




Photo Credit: "cookie and coffee" by Will Taylor. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/subsetsum/5517036930>

Slide 32

Time to work...

AND ADD TO YOUR TOOL BOX



Slide 33

Time to Work

We wear many hats...




Photo Credit: "Hat Montage" by Michael Roach. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mikeroach/4036461280>

Slide 34

We wear many hats...

Time to Work

For today...
Pick a group based on

GRADE LEVEL
or
CONTENT AREA




Photo Credit: "To Wear Many" by Shawn Clover. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shawnclover/6286469608>

Slide 35

Choices

Time to Work

This is your time – pick a goal for the next hour that will allow you to:

- Collaborate with other new teachers in similar settings
- Take time to explore resources
- Share with your mentor when you return and seek specific feedback regarding implementation


Examples of goals

- Find a hands on activity that will enhance a lesson for tomorrow.
- Refine a classroom management strategy.
- Collaborate to develop a common lesson along with common assessments.
- Collaborate to outline a unit with common lessons.
- Identify ways to access student understanding following a learning activity.
- Identify ways to access student engagement during a learning activity.


Slide 36

Celebrate your progress!

Time to Work




Slide 37



YOUR TEACHING IDENTITY: PART 1
HOPES AND DREAMS

Slide 38



Write...

THE TEACHER I DREAM TO BE...

Photo Credit: "Audit4.PNG" by Paty montano. Retrieved from Wikimedia commons at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Audit4.PNG>

Slide 39

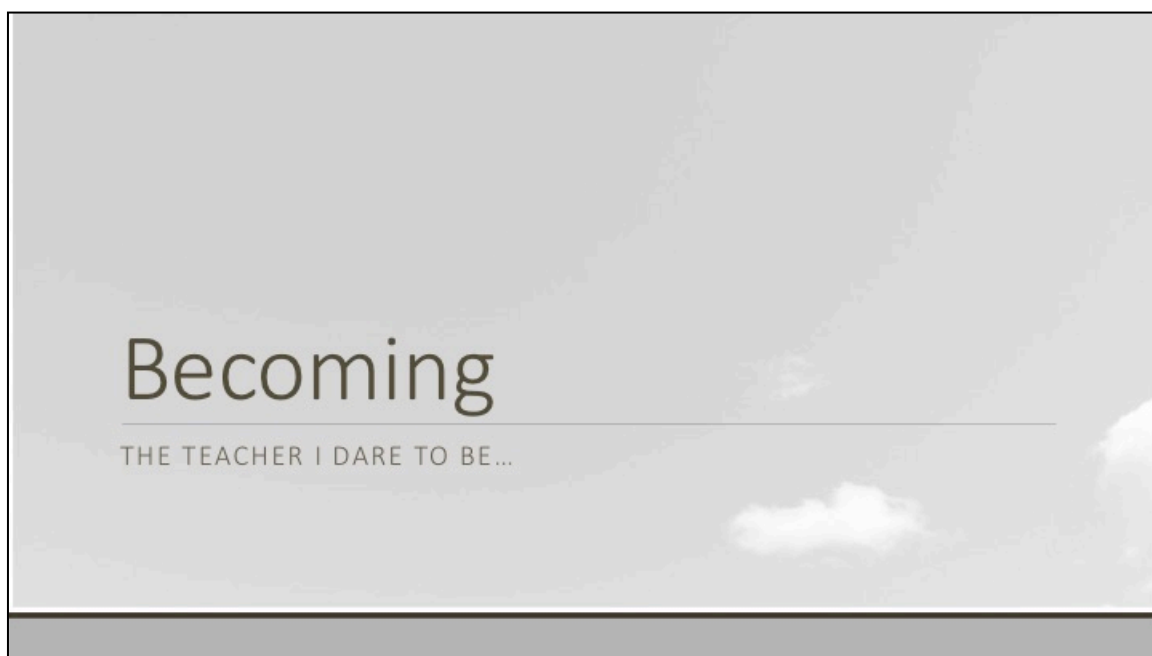


Discuss a bit...

THE TEACHER I DREAM TO BE...

Photo Credit: "Audit4.PNG" by Paty montano. Retrieved from Wikimedia commons at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Audit4.PNG>

Slide 40



Slide 41



Slide 42

Keep in touch...

In the next three days, you will receive a link to a website with contact information, copies of all posters and resources, and a blog for any communication you care to carryout until we meet again.

This website is solely intended as support and connection...

No homework, no extra work is required



Slide 43

Thank you for your work!



Slide 44

Session 2: Moving Along

A detailed overview of each part of the session is outlined below. Resources are inserted and shaded in gray.

Two weeks before Session 2:

Send a letter to all participants (pasted below).

Dear _____,

Thank you for attending Session 1 of the New Teaching on the Prairie Seminar. I hope that you found the day to be enjoyable and useful to your teaching practice. I wanted to give you a little information about Session 2 so you can think about how you want to spend your working time in the afternoon. We will be focusing on areas of support for new teaching in the morning, and in the afternoon, you will have time to work on something that you can use when you return to your classroom. Similar to the afternoon session of Day 1, you will also have access to resources and colleagues so that you can collaborate, solicit feedback, and focus on just one thing.

Some suggestions for areas of focus for your working time might include the following:

Preparing for a substitute teacher

Researching classroom design ideas

Outlining a unit that you will be implanting soon

Working with another teacher to design a lesson with a common assessment

Writing an assessment that is aligned with learning objectives

Differentiating an existing lesson to include activities for early finishers

Preparing for parent-teacher conferences

Designing a learning center

Feel free to contact another teacher in the group to plan a collaborative effort – maybe you can work together to design a lesson, activity, or assessments.

If possible, please let me know what area you have selected so that I can make sure I have resources available for you. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am excited to have the group together again soon.

Thanks so much for your participation during this busy year.

8:00 – 8:45 Introductions and Catching Up

Overview

Slide 2: Objectives for Session 1

Review the objectives, which are listed below:

- Teachers will have the opportunity to build connections with colleagues.
- Teachers will compare their teaching experiences with the phases of first-year

teaching.

- Teachers will discuss strategies for working with their mentor.
- Teachers will focus on one aspect of their teaching practice.
- Teachers will have the time to reflect on their professional practice.

Slide 3: Reviewing Norms

Slides 4-5: Moving Along

1. Show the progress in pictures. The prairie roses are opening, the fields are growing, etc.
2. Invite teachers to compare the growth in the pictures to growth in their teaching practice.

Slide 6: Catching Up

1. Assuming that the new teachers have established a level of familiarity and comfort with each other, provide a casual time for them to catch up by responding to the questions on the slide at their tables. Tell new teachers they will be asked to share highlights from the conversation at 8:30.
2. Invite new teachers to discuss their responses to the following questions. (Until 8:30)
 - What is one thing that happened since the last session that you just have to share with another new teacher?
 - Have you used any of the information or resources from last session? Explain.
 - Based on your experience, if you were going to write a “survival guide for new teachers on the prairie,” what would you include?
3. Ask each table to share the main points of their discussion. Take notes as needed and make efforts to respond to pertinent needs throughout the day and in planning for the final session.

8:45– 10:30 Phases of First-year Teaching

Objectives:

1. Teachers will review the phases of first-year teaching.
2. Teachers will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences as it relates to disillusionment.
3. Teachers will explore strategies to move toward rejuvenation and anticipation.

Preparation:

1. Have copies of the descriptions of Moir’s phases of first-year teaching (available from Los Angeles Unified School District at <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/8346>).
2. Prepare a piece of large newsprint and markers for each group of teachers (about 4 to a group).

Overview:

Slides 8 -9: Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Move through the overview slides to explain the basics of the Moir's (1999) phases. It is likely that the teachers have already reviewed the information with their mentors.
2. Handout descriptions of phases or direct teachers to the New Teacher Center website.
3. Explain that according to Moir's (1999) description, they should have experienced anticipation and survival by the time they meet for this session. Provide teachers time to review the descriptions of anticipation and survival.

Slides 10 - 11: Phases on the Prairie (30 minutes)

1. Invite each group of teachers to use words, symbols, or pictures to depict the part of the line that zooms in on their collective experiences that relate to the anticipation and survival phases. Advise the teachers to use Moir's (1999) descriptions and their experiences to show the experiences that have contributed to their experiences in the anticipation and survival phases.
2. After 20 minutes, invite the teachers to tour the tables and discuss similarities, differences, and insights. (15 minutes)
3. Discuss as a group. (15 minutes)

Slide 12: Results from the Teaching on the Prairie Study (10 minutes)

Share some of the findings from the study: References to survival and anticipation more frequent in the fall than spring; References to disillusionment did not change significantly; not many references to reflection. For most teachers, working with a mentor provided supports through the challenging times.

Slides 13 – 17: Using and Building Supports (30 minutes)

1. Acknowledge the fact that some of the survival characteristics are self-perpetuating.
2. Start with the Survival Stage. Review the definition of survival and remind teachers that surviving is a good thing, but it can be exhausting!
3. Ask the teachers to brainstorm strategies that would reduce the challenges associated with the survival phase. Hand out post-it™ notes to each table. Invite teachers to write one strategy on each post-it™ note and place it on their poster close to the factor that the strategy addresses. Remind them that big changes are great, but often, small changes can make a big difference.
4. Ask table groups to share what they think are the most effective strategies. Promise new teachers that a photo of each poster will be shared with all.
5. Share the “Staying alive” slides with strategies from other resources.
6. Own it! Ask teachers to grab on to the suggestions that seem the best fit for them and tell someone what they will do to build teacher resilience and not only survive but thrive.
7. Wrap up – explain that we will address disillusionment next time, but that most of the same strategies will be helpful when working through disillusionment.

10:30 – 11:45 Working with a mentor**Objectives:**

1. Teachers will explore the four types of mentoring support (as identified by Lipton and Wellman (2001) and described by Boogren (2015).
2. Teachers will discuss the value of receiving support in these areas.
3. Teachers will discuss ways they can seek specific support from their mentors and others.
4. Teachers will discuss how they can focus on different areas of support while completing the requirements of teacher observations.

Preparation:

1. Before this session, ask the teachers to identify the evaluation rubrics used at their schools.
2. Have descriptions of domains associated with classroom instruction and classroom environment on hand for each evaluation tool.

Overview:

Slides 19 – 25: Understanding Types of Mentoring Support (45 minutes)

1. Review the description for each type of support to include physical, emotional, instructional, and institutional (Boogren, 2015)
2. Facilitate a whole group discussion to identify what the **need** for support “looks like” in their rural schools. Solicit specific examples and emphasize that it is normal and expected that new teachers will require support in these areas.
3. Click on the *American Gothic* image, and acknowledge that it is easy to fall into the mode of “I can do it myself” and “I don’t want to bother anyone.”
4. Click on the Support on the Prairie slide and invite teachers to focus on the areas of physical and emotional supports and brainstorm things they could be asking their mentors or colleagues to receive more support. Provide examples as necessary by drawing from the NDTSS mentor training handbook (ESPB, 2016).
5. Share ideas and insights.

Slide 26 - 28: Targeting Areas of Support When Observing Other Teachers (30 minutes)

1. Ask teachers at each table to brainstorm specific areas of focus for physical and instructional aspects of teaching. (10 minutes)
2. Guiding Question: What specific areas could you focus on to benefit your classroom environment and practice?
3. Hand out the evaluation rubric domain descriptions for instruction and classroom environment to provide more ideas for teachers to consider (Provide each teacher with the appropriate rubric to coincide with the evaluation model used for his or her district). Ask them to summarize their brainstorming on a list for “Physical Support” and “Instructional Support” and post on the walls. (20 minutes)

11:45 – 12:45 Lunch and Discussion

Objectives:

1. Teachers will continue to discuss areas and sources of support.
2. Teachers will focus on opportunities that are available during observations.

Preparation:

Provide bag lunches for new teachers.

Overview:

Slide 29: Thinking About Support (40 minutes)

Invite teachers to discuss the areas of support from the following perspectives:

- Support they have received from their mentors, colleagues, and others
- Support they could seek out from mentors, colleagues, and others
- Support they could offer to each other

Slide 30: Dessert (20 minutes)

1. Watch 11 minute “mentoring” video on Teaching Channel
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/mentoring-for-new-teachers>
2. Invite teachers to discuss their reactions to the information and ideas presented in the video.

12:45 – 2:30 Collaboration and Focus on Teaching Practice

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have the chance to share experiences and seek resources in small groups based on teaching context.
2. Teachers will have the time to begin to develop one activity or resource they can use in their classroom practice.
3. Teachers will have the opportunity to conduct professional conversations.

Preparation:

1. Depending on the size of the group, be prepared to suggest various breakout conformations based on grade level and/or content areas.
2. Depending on responses to letter sent to participants, have resources available.
3. Have evaluation rubrics available.

Overview:

Slide 32: We Walk Many Walks

Introduce this activity by explaining that as teachers, we walk to the office with reports and grades, we walk to our classrooms with our lessons, we walk to the games and other extracurricular activities as spectators or advisors, we walk out of our classroom leaving work for a substitute, and we walk to meet parents to discuss their children’s learning.

Slide 33: Pick One Path (90 minutes)

1. Explain that the teachers have the next hour and a half to focus on one thing they would like to accomplish that they can use in their teaching practice before the next session.
2. Explain that during the sharing time, they will be asked how their focus will improve student learning in their classroom.

Slide 34: Celebrate (15 minutes)

Ask teachers to shout out their progress and plans for using what they developed and how it will improve student learning in their classroom.

2:30 – 3:00 Using Reflection and Building Your Teaching Identity

Objectives:

1. Teachers will think about reflection as described by Charlotte Danielson (2007).
2. Teachers will increase their understanding about how reflection can take place during conference time with mentors.

Overview:

Slide 35: Teaching Identity and Reflection (5 minutes)

1. Acknowledge the fact that reflection is a skill that we can continue to build throughout teaching career.
2. Propose that even during this busy first-year, when it does not seem there is time to do one more thing, taking time for reflection is worth it.
3. Remind teachers that reflection can be done with the mentor during conferencing time as well as individually and with other colleagues.

Slide 36 – 37: Reflection (5 minutes)

Ask for examples of how reflection has helped them so far this year.

Slide 38: Connecting Observations, Reflections, and Identity (5 minutes)

Share findings from Kane's (2013) research.

Slide 39: During Your Busy days (15 minutes)

Ask teachers the following questions and ask them to discuss at their tables.

- How can you increase reflection opportunities while also conferencing with your mentor?
- How can you use reflection to bolster emotional support for you?

3:00 – 3:15 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

Overview:

1. Give time to teachers to complete the evaluation (pasted below).

2. Thank teachers for their hard work. Encourage them to keep in touch. Facilitate sharing of resources and contact information through the development of a course-specific Google Site.
3. Let teachers know they will receive a reminder before the next session to bring something with them that they want to focus on for their teaching practice. They will have at least an hour and a half to work on this focus – individually, but with access to others for collaboration and support.
4. Make a list of the evaluation models each school uses to prepare for session 3.

Session 2 Evaluation:

Please rate the following comments following the scale below:

- 1: strongly disagree
- 2: disagree
- 3: agree
- 4: strongly agree

1. _____ Since the last session, I have contacted at least one teacher from participating in this seminar to discuss some aspect of teaching.
2. _____ Since the last session, I feel I am better equipped to seek and respond to feedback from my mentor.
3. _____ Since the last session, I have used one or more tools that I researched or learned about during lunch and our work time.
4. _____ I have a better understanding of the causes and results of the survival phase of first-year teaching.
5. _____ I have at least one specific idea of how I will effectively deal with the survival phase of first-year teaching.
6. _____ I made enough progress during the afternoon work session that I will be able to put my work into action in the next week.
7. _____ This session has been a valuable use of my time.

Please answer the following questions.

8. What has been the most valuable part of this session?

9. What has been the least valuable part of this session?


10. What suggestions do you have to improve the next session?

Thank you so much for sharing your insights and ideas. Your feedback will be reviewed and seriously considered as plans for the next sessions are finalized.

Session 2 Presentation: Moving Along

New Teachers on the Prairie Seminar
Multiple Supports for NDTSS Participants in Rural Schools

SESSION 2: MOVING ALONG



Slide 1

Objectives for the day

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to build connections with colleagues
2. Teachers will compare their teaching experiences with the phases of first-year teaching.
3. Teachers will discuss strategies for working with their mentor.
4. Teachers will focus on one aspect of their teaching practice.
5. Teachers will have the time to reflect on their professional practice.



Slide 2

A reminder of the norms

- Building a culture of support
- Working toward positive solutions
- Celebrating progress
- Being real
- Discussing as respectful professionals

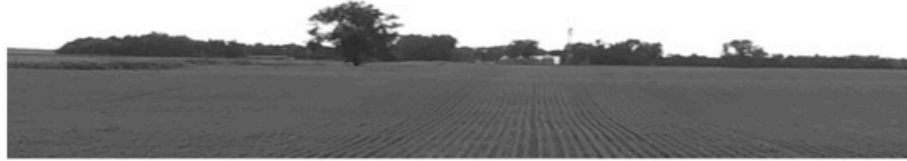
Slide 3

Moving along....



Slide 4

Moving along....



Slide 5

Catching up

Grab a cup of coffee, and catch up by discussing the following at your table.

- 1. What is one thing that happened since the last session that you just have to share with another new teacher?
- 2. Have you used any of the information or resources from last session? Explain.
- 3. Based on your experience, if you were going to write a "survival guide for new teachers on the prairie," what would you include?



Photo Credit: "Pretty in Blue" by anokarina. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/anokarina/6869833257>

Slide 6



Slide 7

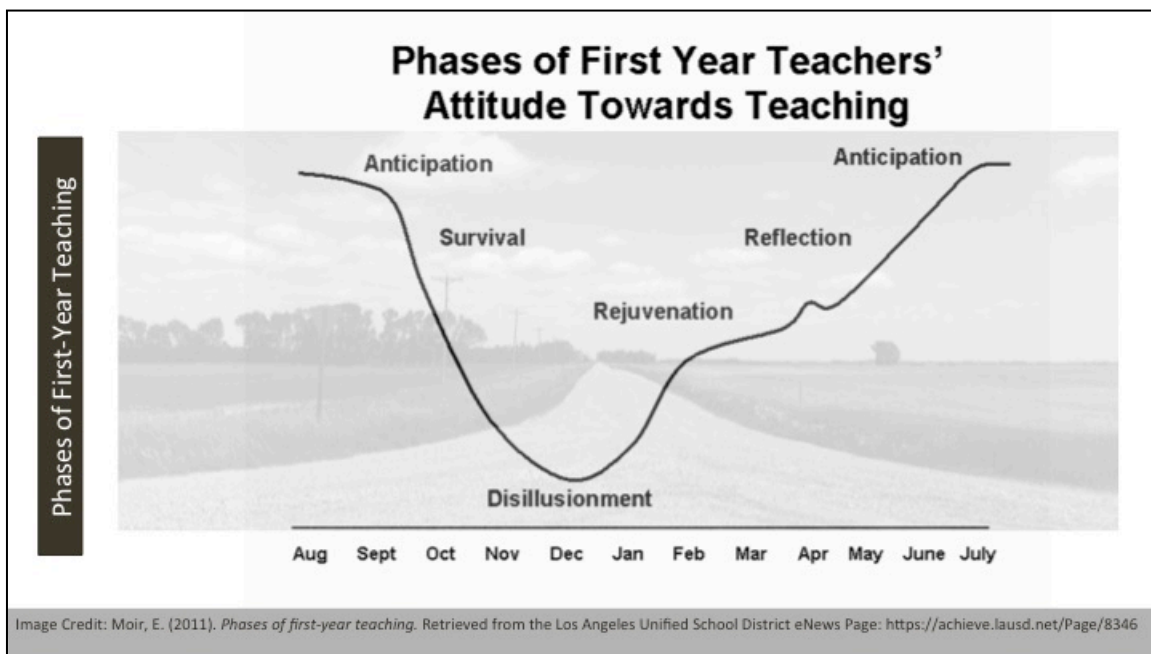
Phases of First-Year Teaching Overview

Phases of First-Year Teaching

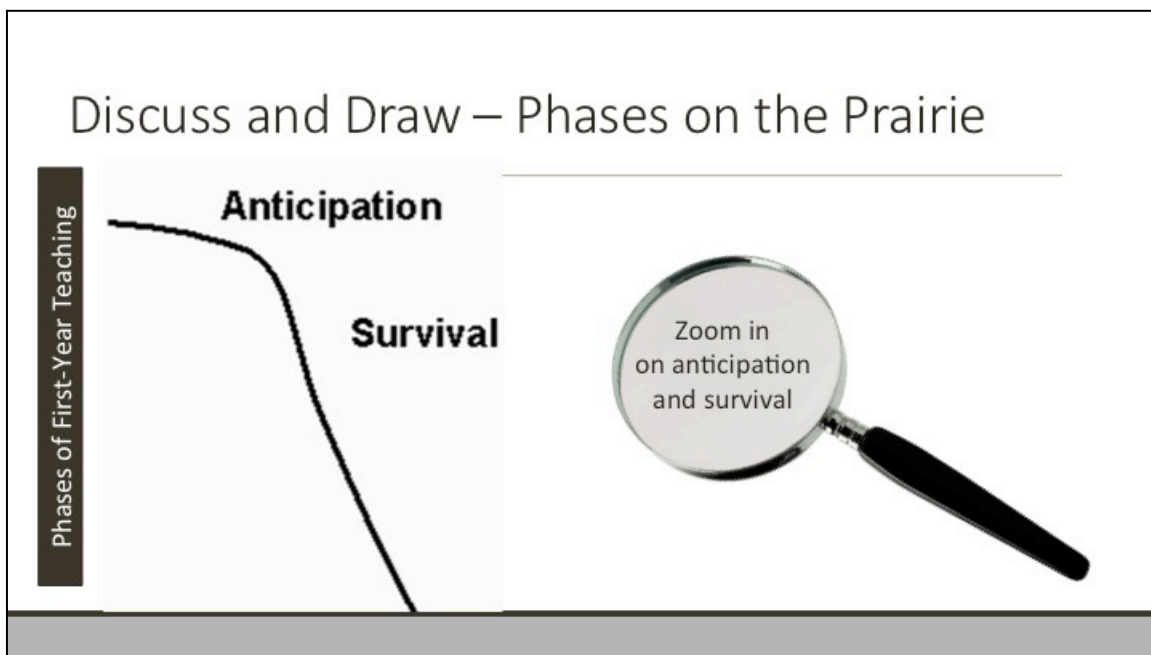
- Proposed by Ellen Moir, in an article published in the newsletter for the California New Teacher Project in 1990 by the California Department of Education.
- Based on the extensive work with new teachers through the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (Moir, 2011).
- Describes five phases that most new teachers experience during their first-year (Moir, 2011).

Moir, E. (2011). *Phases of first-year teaching*. Retrieved from the Los Angeles Unified School District eNews Page: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/8346>

Slide 8



Slide 9



Slide 10

Phases on the Prairie

Phases of First-Year Teaching

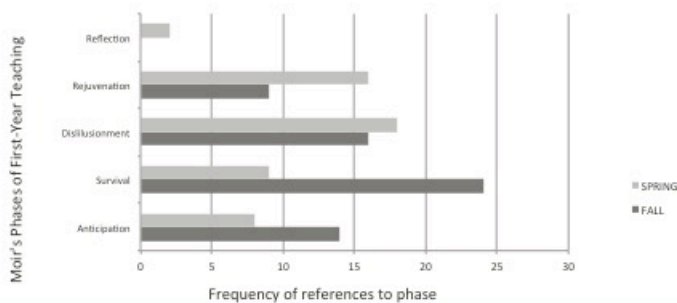
- What did you learn?
- Is there comfort that comes from reviewing the phases and discussing them with other first-year teachers?
- What are the common themes that appeared?

Slide 11

Teaching on the Prairie Results

Phases of First-Year Teaching

- Teachers experienced all phases throughout the year, and working with a mentor helped to level the challenges for most participants in the study.
- An analysis of six sets of conference logs showed that references to the stages changed for most phases.




Slide 12

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Using and Building Supports

START WITH SURVIVAL



Definitions

- “continuing to live or exist especially in spite of difficult conditions.”
(merriam-webster.com)
- “Stayin’ alive”
(Bee Gees and vocabulary.com)

Slide 13

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Using and Building Supports

In addition to working with your mentor, what are other ways you can reduce the challenges associated with the survival phase?




Photo Credit: "Glasses" by Juni. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/freshfruit/6964927155>

Slide 14

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Staying alive through the survival stage.

- **Keep reminding yourself that you won't stay in this phase forever.**
- **Ask someone for support.**
Ex. I am really struggling in the survival phase right now, can you help me to remember this won't last forever? Chocolate would help too."
- **Ask the "how-to" questions right away.**
Don't spend 15 minutes trying to figure out how to make the copy machine staple and copy on both sides.
- **Ask a teacher to share a resource with you.**
Sometimes you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

-- Suggestions based on recommendations for mentors in the book *Supporting Beginning Teachers*.

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting Beginning Teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 15

Phases of First Year Teaching

Staying alive through the survival stage.

- **Develop a network of support from former classmates, friends, family, and colleagues.**
- **When observing other teachers, watch for successful teaching that you can develop in your practice.**
- **Seek help from parents, former classmates, administration, and colleagues.**
- **Take care of yourself – sleep, physical activity, and outside interests can make a big difference.**
- **Hold on to optimism – balanced with realism**
- **Practice reflection to use frustrations as an opportunity to plan to do things differently next time.**

-- Suggested based on research on resilience for new teachers by Melanie Tait, 2008.

Tait, M. (2008). Resilience as a contributor to novice teacher success, commitment, and retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 57-75. Retrieved from <http://www.teqjournal.org/>

Slide 16

Own it!

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Tell someone what you are going to do to build your teacher resilience and not only survive, but thrive.

Slide 17



WORKING WITH A MENTOR

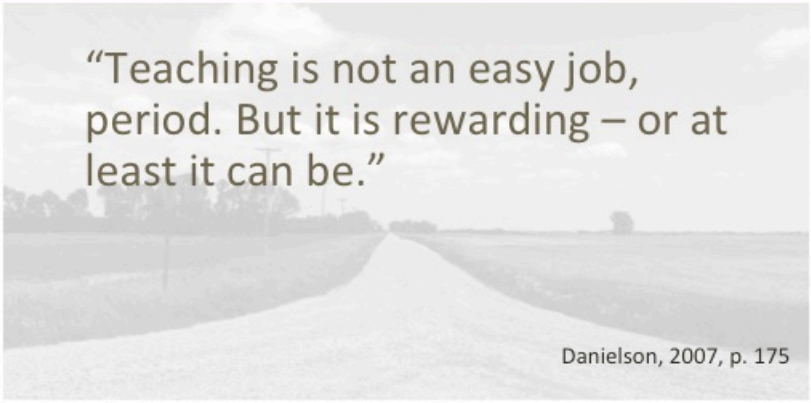
"The task ... is not to make teaching easy; that is probably impossible, given the realities of life."
" (Danielson, 2007, p. 175.)

Danielson, C. (2013). *Framework for teaching evaluation instrument* (2013 ed.). Retrieved from the Danielson Group website: <http://www.loccsd.ca/~div15/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2013-framework-for-teaching-evaluation-instrument.pdf>

Slide 18

Working with a Mentor

Mentoring for New Teachers



“Teaching is not an easy job, period. But it is rewarding – or at least it can be.”

Danielson, 2007, p. 175

Danielson, C. (2013). *Framework for teaching evaluation instrument* (2013 ed.). Retrieved from the Danielson Group website: <http://www.loanccsd.ca/~div15/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2013-framework-for-teaching-evaluation-instrument.pdf>

Slide 19

Working with a Mentor

Understanding types of mentoring support

- According to Lipton and Wellman (2001), there are four types of support that new teachers need:
 1. Physical support
 2. Emotional support
 3. Instructional support
 4. Institutional support

Boogren (2015) provides information about each type of support.

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting beginning teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Lipton, L. & Wellman, B. (2001). *Why mentoring matters: A practical guide to learning-focused relationships*. Sherman, CT: Mira Via.

Slide 20

Figuring out the routine and geography of your setting.

Physical Support

Working with a Mentor

- Supplies
- Resources
- Procedures
- Classroom set up
- Schedules

Boogren (2015)

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting beginning teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 21

Learning how to cope with the stresses and expectations of teaching

Emotional Support

Working with a Mentor

- Exhaustion
- Doubt
- Feeling behind
- Fighting illness
- Questioning career choice

Boogren (2015)

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting beginning teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 22

Always striving to improve your practice.

Instructional Support

Working with a Mentor

- Discerning what isn't working in a lesson
- Learning the language of education
- Using data to inform instruction
- Providing feedback to students
- Using evaluation rubrics to guide progress and measure growth

Boogren (2015)

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting beginning teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 23

Developing as a professional in the teaching field

Institutional Support

Working with a Mentor

- Learning about the culture of the school
- Building professional connections
- Professional learning opportunities
- Extracurricular involvement

Boogren (2015)

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting beginning teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 24

Working with a Mentor

Physical Emotional

Instructional Institutional

Photo Credit: "American Gothic" by Grant Wood. Retrieved from Wikipedia commons at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/71/Grant_DeVolson_Wood_-_American_Gothic.jpg/499px-Grant_DeVolson_Wood_-_American_Gothic.jpg

Slide 25

Working with a Mentor

Physical
Learning the routines

Emotional
Finding care, validation, and motivation

Support on the prairie

Instructional
Developing the teaching practice

Institutional
Developing as a professional

Slide 26

When planning for classroom observation, what specific areas could you focus on to benefit your classroom environment and practice?

Using this information




Photo Credit: HS Classroom by American Community Schools. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/acsamman/433447478>

Slide 27

Would are specific aspects of the classroom and teaching that you can focus on?

Working with a Mentor

Physical

Instructional

Slide 28

Thinking about support

As you eat, share ideas about

Support you have received from your mentors, colleagues, and others

Support you could seek out from mentors, colleagues, and others

Support they could offer to each other



Photo Credit: "Brown Bag (without staple)" by Jeffrey Beall. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/denverjeffrey/4391650061>

Slide 29

VIDEO TIME...

What resonates?

What can you use?

How would you tailor this video for teaching in rural schools?


<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/mentoring-for-new-teachers>

Dessert



Photo Credit: "cookie and coffee" by Will Taylor. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/subsetsum/5517036930>

Slide 30



Time to work...

AND ADD TO YOUR TOOL BOX
COLLABORATION AND FOCUS ON TEACHING PRACTICE

Photo Credit: "tool box DSC_450" by el cajon yacht club. Retrieved from Flickr at https://www.flickr.com/photos/el_cajon_yacht_club/9335128135

Slide 31

Time to Work

We walk many walks...




Photo Credit: "Is 15 pairs enough I ask myself" by Kit. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/practicalowl/6667485609>

Slide 32

Pick one path for now

Time to Work

- For today...
- Pick an area of focus
- Perhaps something you can use later this week.
- Remember the support you have here, feel free to collaborate.
- You will be asked to share how your work will improve student learning in your classroom.




Yogendra Joshi

Photo Credit: "Take a Step" by Yogendra Joshi. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yogendra174/4364939550>

Slide 33

Celebrate your progress!

Time to Work



Slide 34



YOUR TEACHING IDENTITY: PART 2
USING REFLECTION TO IMPROVE YOUR PRACTICE

Slide 35

- “... the ability to reflect on teaching is the mark of a true professional.”

Danielson, 2007, p. 92



Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Photo Credit: "Reflection" by Susanne Nilsson. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/infomastern/31981976973>

Slide 36

Insights after reading Danielson's (2007) description of reflecting on teaching

Using Reflection

- "...although reflection on practice is a natural activity for all professionals, doing it *well*, is a learned skill" (p. 92).
- New teachers may reflect in generalization – the lesson was a disaster, the lesson was awesome.
- Guiding questions during reflection may inquire:
 - What worked well? Why do I think so? How do I know students were learning?
 - What didn't work as I had planned? Why do I think so?
 - What would I do differently next time? How would that make a difference? Who could I ask for suggestions?

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Slide 37

Connecting observations, reflection, and developing teacher identity

Using Reflection

- **According to a study by Kane and Francis (2013)**
- **When new teachers had opportunities to:**
 - Observe other teachers teaching
 - Discuss planning, practice, student learning
 - Discuss challenges
 - Discuss strategies to deal with challenges
- *"These new teachers reported developing increasing confidence as teachers over the first-year of teaching and for some, the experience also supported them to reflect upon and reframe who they were as teachers (Kane & Francis, 2013, p. 371).*

Kane, R., & Francis, A. (2013). Preparing teachers for professional learning: Is there a future for teacher education in new teacher induction? *Teacher Development*, 17, 362-379. doi:10.1080/13664530.2013.813763


Slide 38

During your busy days...

Using Reflection

- 1. How can you increase reflection opportunities while also conferencing with your mentor?
- 2. How can you use reflection to bolster emotional support for you?

Slide 39



UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN...

Slide 40

Keep in touch...

- In the next three days, you will receive a link to a website with contact information, copies of all posters and resources, and a blog for any communication you care to carryout until we meet again.

This website is solely intended as support and connection...

No homework, no extra work is required

Before the next session, you will receive a reminder to bring something with you that you want to focus on for your teaching practice – could be a lesson, a unit overview, an assessment, etc. More details to come.



Slide 41

Thank you for your work!



Slide 42

Session 3: Reaching Out and Moving Forward

A detailed overview of each part of the session is outlined below. Resources are inserted and shaded in gray.

Two weeks before Session 3

Send a letter to all participants (pasted below).

Dear _____,

Thank you for attending the first two sessions of the New Teaching on the Prairie Seminar. I hope that you found the days to be enjoyable and useful to your teaching practice. Once again, I want to give you a little information about Session 3 so you can think about how you will to spend your working time in the afternoon.

We will be focusing on the first-year teaching phases of disillusionment and rejuvenation. We will also spend quite a bit of time talking about the evaluation rubric your school is using. I have a list of the evaluation models that participating teachers' schools are using. We will focus on the domain related to instruction. If you have time, feel free to review that domain to see what area you would like to focus on during your afternoon work session, but this is not required.

During the afternoon work session, you will have an hour and a half to work on a strategy, lesson, or other activity that focus on one component of the instruction domain of the evaluation rubric your school has adopted. Feel free to contact another teacher in the group to plan a collaborative effort – maybe you can work together to design a lesson, activity, or assessments.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am excited to have the group together again soon.

Thanks so much for your participation during this busy year.

8:00 – 8:45 Introduction and Catching Up

Overview:

Slide 2: Objectives for Session 3

1. Review the objectives, which are listed below:

- Teachers will reestablish connections with colleagues.
- Teachers will explore resources that are available at the state level and beyond.
- Teachers will build an understanding of the disillusionment phase and discuss strategies to move to the rejuvenation and anticipation phases.
- Teachers will focus on one aspect of their teaching practice.

- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on ways to deal with isolation in their teaching context.

Slide 3: Reminder of norms

Slides 4 – 5: Reaching out

1. Show the progress in pictures. The prairie roses are both open, the fields are blooming, etc.
2. Invite teachers to compare the growth in their teaching practice and opportunities to reach out beyond their classrooms – or at least consider doing so in the near future.

Slide 6: Catching Up (Until 8:30)

1. Assuming that new teachers have established a level of familiarity and comfort with each other, provide a casual time for them to catch up by responding to the questions on the slide at their tables. Tell the teachers they will be asked to share highlights from the conversation at 8:30.
2. Invite new teachers to discuss their responses to the following questions.
 - What is one thing that happened since the last session that you just have to share with another new teacher?
 - Have you used any of the information or resources from last session? Explain.
 - Based on your experience, if you could bring in any expert to provide information you could use in your classroom, what topic would you focus on?
 - Ask each table to share the main points of their discussion. Take notes as needed and make efforts to respond to pertinent needs throughout the day and in planning for the final session.

8:45– 9:45 The Phases of First-year Teaching

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences related to disillusionment. Teachers will review the phases of first-year teaching.
2. Teachers will review the phases of first-year teaching.
3. Teachers will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences related to disillusionment.
4. Teachers will explore strategies to move toward rejuvenation and anticipation.

Preparation:

1. Make sure to have copies (distributed during session 2) of Moir’s phases of first-year teaching (available from Los Angeles Unified School District at <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/8346>).
2. Copy a “four corners” discussion sheet for each table.
3. Copy a “Hang on” handout for each participant.
4. Have evaluation rubrics on hand – focus on instructional practice.

Overview:

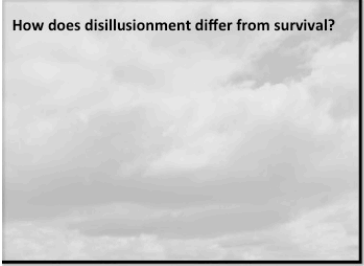
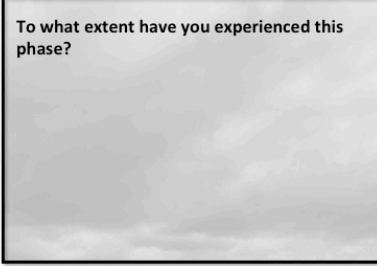


Slide 8: Overview of the Phases

1. Remind teachers that last session, we focused on survival, and that today, we will focus on understanding and moving through the disillusionment phase.
2. Handout descriptions of phases or direct teachers to the New Teacher Center website. Review the section on disillusionment.

Slide 9: The Disillusionment Phase (10 minutes)

1. Invite each table to discuss their responses to the questions about the disillusionment phase, which are listed below.
 - How does disillusionment differ from survival?
 - To what extent have you experienced this phase?
 - How do you cope?
 - What would help?
2. Ask teachers to summarize the factors that correspond to each question by jotting notes in the “Four Corners” handout.
3. Facilitate a large-group discussion on their findings.

Four Corners handout for teachers to take notes during discussion

<p>How does disillusionment differ from survival?</p> 	<p>To what extent have you experienced this phase?</p> 
<p>How do you cope?</p> 	<p>What would help?</p> 

Slides 10 – 13: Disillusionment (15 minutes)

1. Go through slides as needed to review some of the causes, results, and supports that are related to this phase.
 - Contributing factors to disillusionment
 - Results of the phase
 - Supports
2. Invite teachers to discuss the information related to the phase of disillusionment using

the questions below as guides.

- What did you learn?
- Is there comfort that comes from reviewing the phases and discussing them with other first-year teachers?
- What are the common themes that appeared in your discussion?

Slide 14: Results from the Teaching on the Prairie Study (5 minutes)

1. Ask teachers for their insight as to why disillusionment seemed to show up consistently through both semesters among new teachers in rural schools. (It is possible that in the spring many extracurricular activities as well as standardized assessments and other activities and obligations tend to spread everyone in small schools very thin).
2. Most teachers reported that working with a mentor was important in getting through this part of their first-year. Some reported that once they started to trust their mentors, the support was even more meaningful.


Slides 15-16: Coping with Disillusionment (15 minutes)


1. Use discussion to identify examples of how working through specific issues with a mentor in a reflective manner can help make this phase seem manageable.
2. Make the analogy to winter snowstorms on the prairie and using a rope to find the way back from the barn.
3. Handout “Hang On” (see below) and provide time for teachers to discuss and complete.
4. Help new teachers think of specific things they can do when things seem like a blizzard in their life.

Hang on...
When things get tough, when you are questioning yourself, when you don't what to do next, do one thing or another.... (see below)

Best strategies for self-care

Songs to see me through the tough times...



 Lifelines: Whom will you call?

Your mentor has you covered...
 How can you let your mentor you need support?

Slides 17 - 20: From Disillusion to Rejuvenation (15 minutes)

1. Start with the quote “Having a bad lesson doesn't make you a bad teacher. We all have off days. It's what you do afterwards that makes the difference” (Stock, 2016).
2. Review visual of phases and emphasize that the rejuvenation phase has ups and downs.
3. Ask why this is a good time to focus more closely on the challenges of teaching practices? (When teachers are not in survival or disillusion phases, they are better equipped to focus on challenges associated with improving teaching practice.

9:45– 10:30 Working with a Mentor

Objectives:

1. Teachers will have the opportunity to review one aspect of their evaluation rubric with a growth mindset.
2. Teachers will explore how they can work with their mentor to improve specific aspects of their teaching practice.

Preparation:

Make sure that teachers have a copy of the evaluation model used by their schools. It is not necessary to have the entire rubric, just the portion dealing with classroom practice.

Overview:

Slides 21 - 25: Using the Rubrics with a Growth Mindset (25 minutes)

1. Ask teachers to form groups according to evaluation models used by their schools. (For the most part, ND uses Marshall, Marzano, or Danielson.)
2. Go to the “GROWTH” slide and discuss the format of the rubrics moving from basic to proficient, and how this progression can guide growth.
3. At the “Learning the language of your rubric” slide, encourage teachers to discuss things that do not make sense about the evaluation rubric their school uses. This could be anything from vocabulary to organization to the way it is used. Have teachers make a list to take back to their mentors and discuss. Suggest that they report their findings on the seminar website.
4. At the “Looking at your evaluation rubric as a guide” slide, propose that teachers shift their focus from some of the “judgmental” terms on evaluation rubrics and view the descriptions as a guide. If teachers are not currently implementing a practice, they can progress from “starting” and use the language of the rubric to mark improvements. It might be helpful to ask teachers how they feel about getting a “1” or “0” on the evaluation rubric. If this feels like a failure to some of them, suggest that they try to reframe and think of it as a logical beginning place for some aspects of teaching that they didn’t learn in their pre-service experience.
5. Provide time for teachers to work in pairs to focus on one part of their evaluation rubric. Ask them to discuss what the progress of descriptions would “look like” in their classrooms.
6. Ask teachers how they can use support from their mentors to move to the next level on the rubric.

10:30 – 11:45 Exploring Supports that Fit Your Needs

Objectives:

1. Teachers will collaborate to focus on one aspect of first-year teaching.
2. Teachers will review and explore resources associated to one essential question posed on the video that will be featured from the Teaching Channel.
3. Teachers will share what they learned and how it can apply to their teaching experience.

Preparation:

1. Prepare “Breadcrumb trail” handouts for each participant (pasted below).
2. Make sure there are computers and Internet connections.
3. If possible, provide breakout rooms for small groups.

Overview:

Slide 26: Exploring Supports

1. Ask teachers to respond to the Shulman (2004) quote about the complexity of teaching.
2. Explain that although it is true that teaching can be complex, demanding, challenging, and overwhelming, it becomes less so with collaboration, support, and focus on progress.

Slide 27-28: To the Teaching Channel (75 minutes)

1. Go to the “Pick a Piece” slide and explain that the Teaching Channel has organized a section of their website to help teachers answer the four essential questions listed on the slide. Invite teachers to select the question that seems most pertinent to their practice. Divide teachers into groups by questions they select with all teachers who selected the same question in one group. Divide into subgroups if needed so there are no more than five teachers in each group.
2. Introduce the “Breadcrumb trail” strategy to taking notes by explaining that it can be easy to get lost when digging into a website of resources. Invite teachers to keep a record of where they have been and where they might want to return by using the guide (pasted below) to keep track of their travels through the resources.
3. Inform teachers they will be breaking into groups of teachers from each group in a jigsaw activity to share the highlights of what they learned.
4. Send teachers to separate areas to explore one of the essential questions from the New Teacher Survival Guide at the Teaching Channel.
(<https://www.teachingchannel.org/new-teacher>)

<i>Breadcrumbs Trail</i>	
Record your path so you can come back again.	
1. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	<i>Quotes to remember:</i>
2. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	
3. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	<i>Be sure to share:</i>
4. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	
5. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	
6. _____ (Name) <i>Information to come back to:</i>	
<i>Other notes...</i>	

11:45 – 1:15 Lunch and Discussion

Objective:

Teachers will show and discuss what they learned while exploring the Teaching Channel resources.

Preparation:

Provide bag lunches for the teachers.

Overview:

Slide 29: Thinking About Support (45 minutes)

1. Encourage teachers to divide themselves into small groups that include teachers who focused on all four essential questions.
2. Invite teachers to share what they learned with a focus on instructional practices.

Slide 30: Screen Time (45 minutes)

1. Stay in groups, and encourage teachers to show the sites and videos that were most meaningful. (20 minute)
2. Discuss how topics that were covered align to the evaluation rubrics they reviewed earlier (25 minutes)

1:15 – 3:00 Collaboration and Focus on Teaching Practice**Objectives:**

1. Teachers will select one specific area to target for growth.
2. Teachers will seek resources to support them in that area.
3. Teachers will share their ideas and make a plan to work towards growth as measured by the evaluation rubric their school uses.

Preparation:

Prepare a copy of “Reaching Out and Moving Forward” for each teacher.

Overview:

Slides 31-33: Reaching Out (15 minutes)

1. Explain that we grow at different rates at different times in our teaching career. Just as we had growth spurts during childhood and adolescence, we have professional growth spurts as well. We also have times that seem like we are not making any progress. Those can be the times that self-care and patience are crucial. Those can also be the times when we are making progress that will lead to a future growth spurt.
2. Explain that the teachers will have time to explore one specific area they would like to focus on for growth that allows them to reach out beyond their classroom and school by collaborating, attending professional learning opportunities, or other means to plan and measure growth in one area.
3. Hand out the “Reaching Out and Moving Forward” guide (pasted on next page) and explain that these are steps that will help them develop a SMART goal (describe as needed) for their progress. Explain the components of the guide as needed – have an example ready to share if needed.

Slide 34: Time to work (45 minutes)

Provide time for teachers to work on their plan, research their resources, and complete their guide.

Reaching Out and Moving Forward
1. Identify the item you have selected with enough clarity to find it again: _____
2. Describe the level of your current practice for this item: _____
3. Describe the level of practice you will attain by completing the sentence below: <i>By _____ (date), I will reach the _____ level of the item listed above.</i>
4. Describe how meeting this goal will improve your teaching practice: _____ _____
5. Identify the steps that you will take to meet this goal: _____ _____ _____
6. Identify resources (in addition to your mentor) that you will use to reach this goal: _____ _____ _____
7. Describe how your mentor can help you reach this goal: _____ _____ _____
8. Describe how you will celebrate when you reach this goal: _____ _____
Will you share your progress on the course website?

Slide 35: Writing a SMART goal (15 minutes)

1. Review and provide examples as needed.
2. Give teachers time to convert the information on their “Reaching Out” guide to a

SMART goal.

3. Ask teachers to share their goals with each other at the table.

Slides 36-37: Sharing (30 minutes)

1. Ask teachers to explain the resources they will use to reach out and move forward to meet the goal. Keep track of the resources and facilitate the discussion to highlight the benefits of reaching out – especially in a rural setting where isolation can be a factor.
2. Ask teachers to explain how they will celebrate reaching this goal. Record and post to the seminar website. Emphasize the benefits of sharing and celebrating successes – large and small.

3:00 – 3:30 Evaluation, reminders, wrapping up

1. Remind teachers of their journal writing the first day and that they are becoming the teachers they want to be through continuous growth.
2. Give time to teachers to complete the evaluation (pasted below).
3. Thank teachers for their hard work. Encourage them to keep in touch. Facilitate sharing of resources and contact information through the development of a course-specific Google Site.
4. Encourage them to seek ways to stay connected, reach out, work with their mentors, and celebrate their successes.

Session 3 Evaluation:

Please rate the following comments following the scale below:

- 1: strongly disagree
- 2: disagree
- 3: agree
- 4: strongly agree

1. _____ Since the last session, I have contacted at least one teacher from participating in this seminar to discuss some aspect of teaching.
2. _____ I have improved the way I communicate with my mentor because of the information we have covered in these sessions.
3. _____ I have used one or more resources that I have explored or learned about during these sessions.
4. _____ I have a better understanding of the causes and results of the disillusionment phase of first-year teaching.
5. _____ I have at least one specific idea of how I will effectively deal with the disillusionment phase of first-year teaching.

6. _____ I have a better understanding of how to use my school's evaluation rubric as a tool for growth.
7. _____ This session has been a valuable use of my time.

Please answer the following questions.


8. What has been the most valuable part of this session?
9. What has been the least valuable part of this session?
10. What suggestions do you have to improve the next seminar for new teachers?

Thank you so much for sharing your insights and ideas. Your feedback will be reviewed and seriously considered as plans for the next seminar is finalized.

Session 3 Presentation: Reaching Out

Multiple Supports for NDTSS participants in rural schools


SESSION 3: REACHING OUT



Slide 1

Objectives for the day

- Teachers will reestablish connections with colleagues.
- Teachers will explore resources that are available to you at the state level and beyond.
- Teachers will build an understanding of the disillusionment phase and discuss strategies to move to the rejuvenation and anticipation phases.
- Teachers will focus on one aspect of your teaching practice.
- Teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on ways to deal with isolation in their teaching context.



Slide 2

A reminder of the norms

- Building a culture of support
- Working toward positive solutions
- Celebrating progress
- Being real
- Discussing as respectful professionals

Slide 3

Reaching out



Slide 4

Reaching out....



Slide 5

Catching up

Grab a cup of coffee, and catch up by discussing the following at your table.

1. What is one thing that happened since the last session that you just have to share with another new teacher?
2. Have you used any of the information or resources from last session? Explain.
3. Based on your experience, if you could bring in any expert to provide information you could use in your classroom, what topic would you focus on?



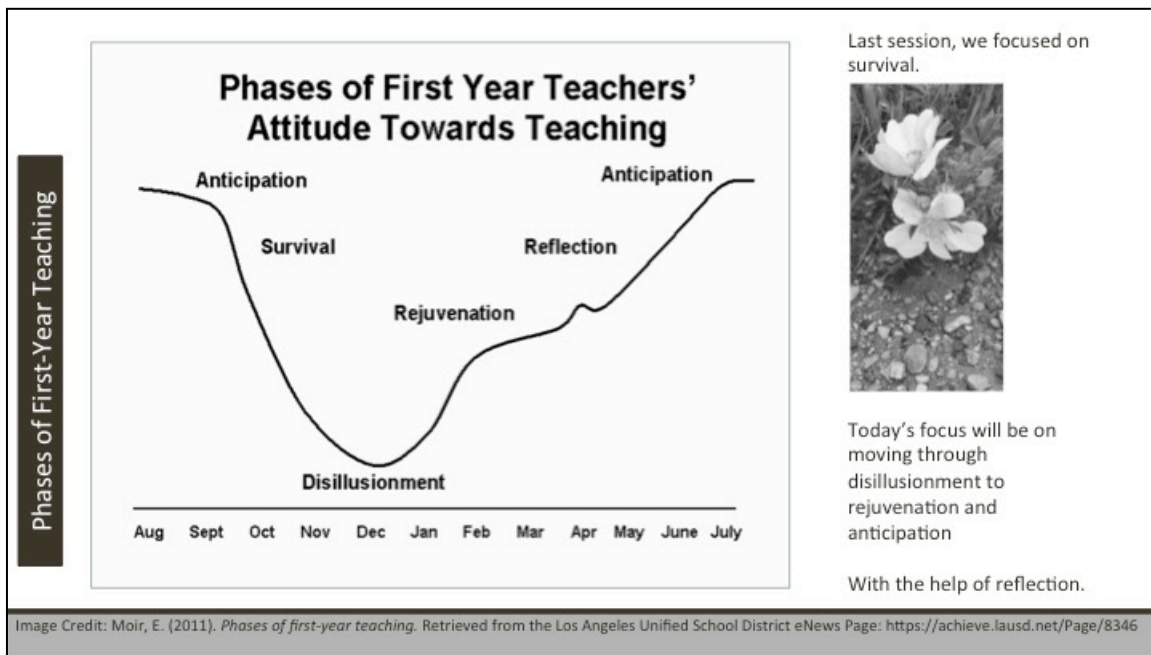
Photo Credit: "Pretty in Blue" by anokarina. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/anokarina/6869833257>

Slide 6



PHASES OF FIRST-YEAR TEACHING

Slide 7



Slide 8

Phases of First-Year Teaching

The disillusionment phase...



- How does disillusionment differ from survival?
- To what extent have you experienced this phase?
- How do you cope?
- What would help?

Slide 9

Factors that can contribute to this phase

Exhaustion

Classroom management

“Firsts”

- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Evaluations
- Standardized assessments
- Grades

(Moir, 2011)

Moir, E. (2011). *Phases of first-year teaching*. Retrieved from the Los Angeles Unified School District eNews Page: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/8346>

Slide 10

Results of living in the disillusionment phase

- Doubt
- Stress and physical problems
- Questioning career choice
- Struggles finding a balance between personal care and professional responsibilities
- **The need for emotional support!**

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting Beginning Teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 11

Supports through disillusionment

- Check in with mentor and other supportive colleagues daily (or more)
- Celebrate successes
- Write down your successes and review them frequently
- Some teachers find help from a journal or a double journal with their mentor or other colleague
- Remember that this is a temporary phase of teaching
- Remember you are embarking on a huge learning curve that will level off
- Seek assistance in increasing efficiency
- Don't be afraid to ask teachers to share resources
- Check with your mentor to develop realistic, feasible, short-term goals
- Be on guard – this phase can return – be ready for it and know that it won't last

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting Beginning Teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 12

Phases on the Prairie

Phases of First-Year Teaching

What did you learn?

Is there comfort that comes from reviewing the phases and discussing them with other first-year teachers?

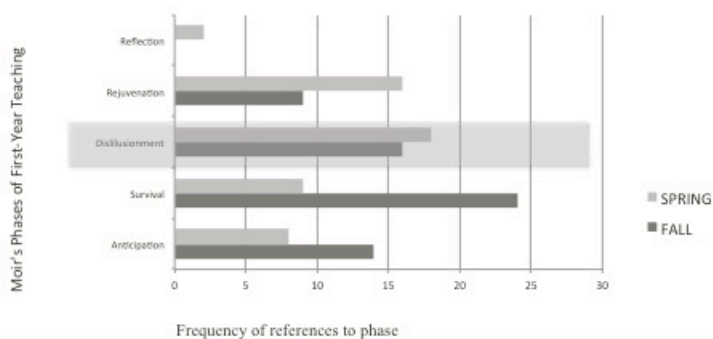
What are the common themes that appeared?

Slide 13

Teaching on the Prairie Results

Phases of First-Year Teaching

A review of conference logs showed references to disillusionment during both spring and fall semesters with high consistency, but more in the spring than in the fall.



Slide 14

Reflection and getting through disillusionment

Phases of First-Year Teaching



Photo Credit: "Reflection" by Susanne Nilsson. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/infomastern/31981976973>

Slide 15

What can serve as your rope?

Phases of First-Year Teaching



Photo source: Near whiteout in Minnesota. Retrieved from wikimedia commons at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nearwhiteoutinminnesota.JPG>

Slide 16

From disillusion to rejuvenation

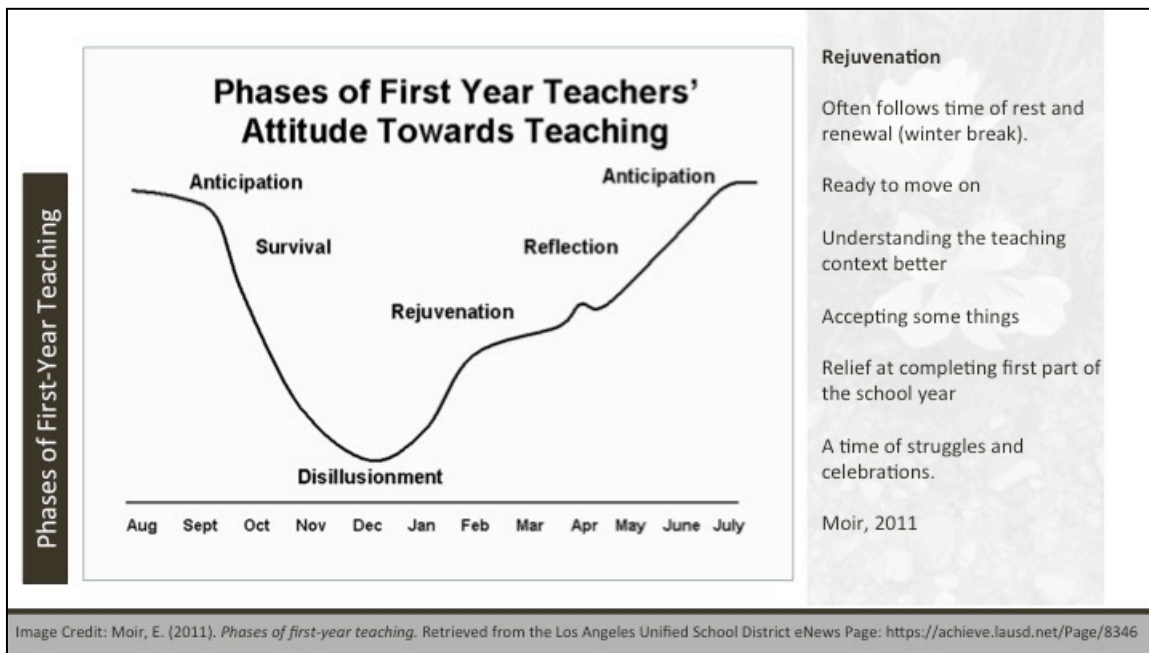
“Having a bad lesson doesn't make you a bad teacher. We all have off days. It's what you do afterwards that makes the difference.”

Josh Stock, 2016



Josh Stock. (2016, September 6). Having an off day: A letter to new teachers. [Web log post]. Retrieved from Edutopia at <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/having-an-off-day-josh-stock>

Slide 17



Slide 18

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Rejuvenation



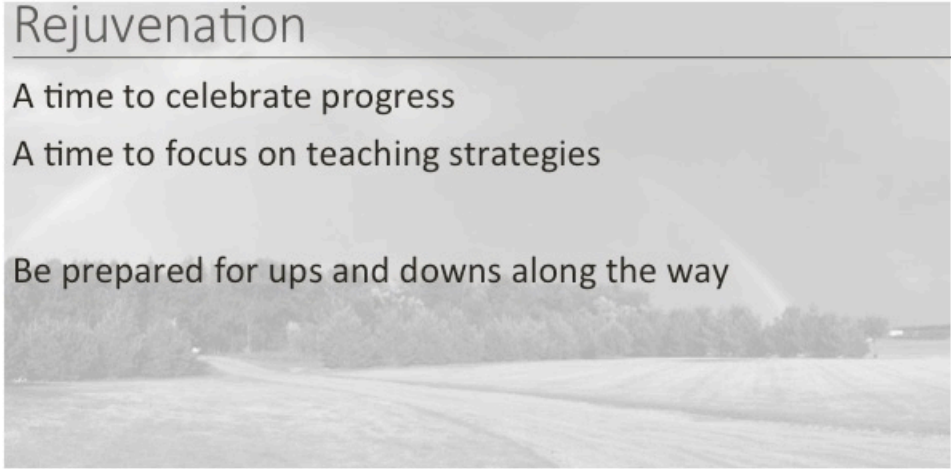
Slide 19

Phases of First-Year Teaching

Rejuvenation

A time to celebrate progress
A time to focus on teaching strategies

Be prepared for ups and downs along the way



Slide 20



WORKING WITH YOUR MENTOR

Slide 21

Growth

Evaluation rubrics can be used for growth as well as for evaluation.

Look at them with a focus on improvement.

How can the rubrics guide you and help you to measure your progress?



Photo credit: Growth by Sergiu Bacioiu. Retrieved from Flickr at https://www.flickr.com/photos/sergiu_bacioiu/3252320147

Slide 22

Learning the language of your rubric

What doesn't make sense?

Make a list to take back to your mentor



Slide 23

Looking at your evaluation rubric as a guide

Reframe the categories to consider the progress you make and the goals you set

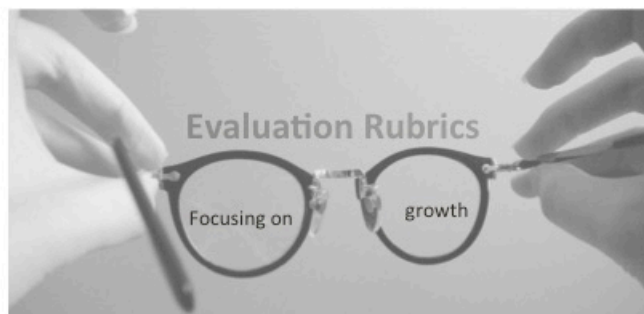


Photo Credit: "Glasses" by Juni. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/freshfruit/6964927155>

Slide 24

Work in pairs with your rubric

- Focus on a section of the rubric associated with teaching strategies.
- Discuss what each description would “look like” in your classroom.
- How can your mentor assist you in developing these skills and practices.



Slide 25



EXPLORING SUPPORTS THAT FIT YOUR NEEDS

Teaching ...

"is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening activity that our species has ever invented" (Lee Shulman, p. 504).

Shulman, L. S. (2004). The wisdom of practice: Essays on teaching, learning, and learning to teach. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Slide 26

Pick one piece

1. What can I do to prepare for my first year of teaching?
2. How do I get started with planning?
3. How do I develop a positive classroom culture?
4. What small strategies can have big impacts in my classroom?



The Teaching Channel New Teacher Survival Guide. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingchannel.org/new-teacher>

Photo credit: Puzzled by Jeremy Crow. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jhcrow/1967795539/>

Slide 27

Use a breadcrumb trail as you explore



Photo Credit: Prairie Trail by Adam Baker. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/adbaker/31392076036>

Slide 28

Thinking about support

- *As you eat, share ideas about*
- What you learned as you explored one question.



Photo Credit: "Brown Bag (without staple)" by Jeffrey Beall. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/denverjeffrey/4391650061>

Slide 29

Screen time

- Share the best links and information
- Why are these sites useful?

Dessert



Photo Credit: "cookie and coffee" by Will Taylor. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/subsetsum/5517036930>

Slide 30

Time to work...

REACHING OUT



Slide 31

We grow
at
different
rates at
different
times



Photo Credit: "Growth Chart" by Christa. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/christaface/7107377499/>

Slide 32

Focus on one little thing...

For today...

- Pick one specific item on your evaluation rubric.
- How can you develop a plan to reach out and move toward the next step.
- Remember the support you have here, feel free to collaborate.



Photo Credit: "Seedling" by Poppet with a camera. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/infobunny/6990260933/>

Slide 33

But first...

Don't think of your area of focus as an evaluation rubric, think of it as a "scale for measuring teacher progress" (Boogren, 2015, location 1350 in the Kindle Version Chapter 5)

- Pick an item that is meaningful to you. Perhaps an item you are currently using or are at the beginning level.
- Consider working with a partner.
- Write a plan using the "Reaching Out and Moving Forward" guideline.

Boogren, T. (2015). *Supporting Beginning Teachers*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research

Slide 34

Writing your SMART goal

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Timely

Slide 35

Time to share

Reaching out helps to minimize the challenges of isolation.

How will you reach out as you use resources to meet your goal?



Slide 36

Time to share

Celebration helps to minimize the challenges of isolation.

How will you celebrate when you reach your goal?



Photo Credit: "Celebrate!" by Mary Lee Hahn. Retrieved from Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/marlyeehahn/10046216946/>

Slide 37

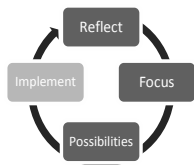
You are on the way to becoming the teacher you want to be.

Enjoy the journey and keep in touch!



Slide 38

Appendix B: Conference Log



CONFERENCE LOG

REV. 06-2012



First-year teacher _____ Mentor: _____

Date _____ Time _____ Duration: _____ School: _____

Progress from last conference: <i>Recommended if you haven't already touched base on implementation of plans made during last meeting.</i>		Reflect
What I feel good about: <i>Required</i>	What feels the most challenging: <i>Required</i>	
Focus for today: <i>Required</i>		Focus
Identify the Domains, Components and Elements you are working with today <i>Required</i>		
Evidence: <i>Use if needed</i>		
Possible solutions: <i>Use if needed</i>		Plan
Teacher's next steps: <i>Required</i>	Mentor's Next Steps: <i>Required</i>	
Resource ideas: <i>Use if needed</i>		
Next meeting date: <i>Required</i>		

Copied with permission from the NDTSS (2013) *Mentor Handbook Levels of Performance*.

Appendix C: Levels of Performance Rubric

Teacher: _____ Mentor: _____
 Date: _____ Grade Level/Content Area: _____

To be completed after two observations and three face-to-face conferences.

Please complete the following checklist by selecting the most appropriate level for each component. Please only check one box for each component.

FALL 2013: CURRENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE RUBRIC

DOMAIN 1: PLANNING AND PREPARATION												
Component 1a												
Demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy	Teacher displays little understanding of the subject or structure of the discipline, or of content-related pedagogy.			Teacher's content and pedagogical knowledge represents basic understanding but does not extend to connections with other disciplines or to possible student misconceptions.			Teacher demonstrates solid understanding of the content and its prerequisite relationships and connections with other disciplines. Teacher's instructional practices reflect current pedagogical knowledge.			Teacher's knowledge of the content and pedagogy is extensive, showing evidence of a continuing search for improved practice. Teacher actively builds on knowledge of prerequisites and misconceptions when describing instruction or seeking causes for student misunderstanding.		
	Current Level of performance	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average
Component 1b												
Demonstrating knowledge of students	Teacher makes little or no attempt to acquire knowledge of students' backgrounds, skills, or interests, and does not use such information in planning.			Teacher demonstrates partial knowledge of students' backgrounds, skills, and interests, and attempts to use this knowledge in planning for the class as a whole.			Teacher demonstrates thorough knowledge of students' backgrounds, skills, and interests, and uses this knowledge to plan for groups of students.			Teacher demonstrates thorough knowledge of students' backgrounds, skills, and interests, and uses this knowledge to plan for individual student learning.		
	Current Level of performance	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average
Component 1c												
Designing coherent instruction	Teacher's goals represent trivial learning, are unsuitable for students, or are stated only as instructional activities, and they do not permit viable methods of assessment.			Teacher's goals are of moderate value or suitability for students in the class, consisting of a combination of goals and activities, some of which permit viable methods of assessment.			Teacher's goals represent valuable learning and are suitable for most students in the class; they reflect opportunities of integration and permit viable methods of assessment			Teacher's goals reflect high-level learning relating to curriculum frameworks and standards; they are adapted, where necessary to the needs of individual students, and permit viable methods of assessment.		
	Current Level of performance	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low	Average

Modified with permission from the NDTSS (2013) *Mentor Handbook Levels of Performance*.

Appendix D: Interview Protocols and Questions

Synchronous interview protocol

Project: Teaching on the Prairie: Participation in the NDTSS mentoring program and the experience and effectiveness of new teachers in rural schools

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewer: Mary Eldredge-Sandbo

Interviewee pseudonym:

Purpose of the study:

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between participation in the NDTSS program and any change in the experience and practice of new teachers in rural schools. Although I have collected, and will analyze, other data from the year, it is not possible to truly understand the experience of NDTSS participants' first year of teaching without having the opportunity to hear what the participants have to say. Therefore, not only do I greatly appreciate your participation, I want you to know that you are contributing to this study in a very important way.

The individuals and sources of data being collected:

In addition to this interview, I will also interview two other NDTSS participants from each of the other three quadrants of the state. I have also sent the same questions via e-mail to other teachers who also agreed to participate in this study.

I will analyze the responses to the interview questions to look for common and unique themes that describe the experience of rural teachers who participated in the NDTSS program during the past school year. In addition, I have collected samples of conference logs and levels of performance rubrics from other first-year teacher/mentor pairs who agreed to participate in this study. By analyzing all of the data, I hope to be able to enhance the understanding of how participation in the NDTSS program affects the teaching experience.

Handling of the data to protect confidentiality

To protect your anonymity and the anonymity of your mentor, I will use pseudonyms and only describe your school in terms of the state quadrant and general size of the school. I ask that you try to refrain from naming your mentor during this interview, but if you do, please rest assured that I will change it to a pseudonym in all transcripts. I will keep a copy of the recording on an external storage device but will delete it from my computer and will not use any identifying information about you or any other people you mention in the transcript or study. When I am done with the recording, I will place a copy of it and the transcript in a locked box or file, which will be stored in my home for at least 5 years,

according to Walden University's regulations. I will destroy the transcripts by shredding and the digital copies by deleting them after that time. Although I will not share names or schools with the NDTSS coordinator, I will invite her to review summaries of my findings as an extra assurance that I have not breached the confidentiality of any new teachers, mentors, or schools in the study.

I will record this interview on two different devices just to make sure that I have a good quality recording. I will transcribe the entire interview onto a Microsoft Word document and then I will begin to analyze the data. If you are interested, I will also e-mail you a copy of the preliminary summary of your interview. This is called a member-check, and I will ask you to look it over to see if my analysis is consistent with what you meant. After receiving your feedback, I will make necessary changes before moving forward with the analysis. If you do not respond with feedback after 10 days, I will move forward with analysis. The e-mail address to which you will send any correspondence about this interview is designated for the sole purpose of this study. I will not share your e-mail address with anyone, and I will delete this account at the end of the study

Length of the interview

I will try to keep this interview to one hour, but I promise we will not go longer than 90 minutes.

Do you have any questions?

Letter of Consent for face to face interviews

Last fall, you signed a letter of consent to participate in this interview. Here is a copy of that letter for you to review before we begin. I'll set up the recording equipment while you look it over. If you have any questions, please let me know before we begin.

Letter of Consent for telephone interviews

Before we get started, I want to review the letter of informed consent, which you signed last fall before I ask any questions. I recently mailed a copy of this letter to you. As you know, the letter reviewed potential risks and benefits to participants in this study. I want to verify that you have received a copy of your signed letter. Please ask if you have any questions you have about this letter, and then we can get started!

Questions:

(I have also included follow-up questions, which I will ask as time allows)

1. Please tell me why you decided to pursue a teaching career.
 - a. What grade/subject did you want to teach?
 - b. Did your teaching experience match your expectations?
2. Would you please tell me about your teaching assignment this past year?
 - a. What grade and/or subjects did you teach?
 - b. Did you have any extra-curricular assignments?

3. Since one focus of this study centers on teaching in rural schools, please tell me about teaching in a rural school.
 - a. Did you ever attend a rural school as a student?
 - b. Did you live in the same town as the school where you taught?
 - c. What were the benefits of teaching in a small school?
 - d. What were the challenges of teaching in a small school?
4. Would you please tell me about working with a mentor for your first year? I did not have a mentor and even though I attended the mentor training, it is hard for me to really imagine what the process would be like.
 - a. When did you find out that you would have a mentor?
 - b. Were you happy to hear this?
 - c. How often did you and your mentor meet?
 - d. Was your mentor in the same school?
 - e. How similar was your mentor's teaching assignment to yours?
 - f. What was the best part of working with the mentor?
 - g. Were there any drawbacks to participating in the process?
 - h. Looking back on the year, how would you evaluate your role in the mentoring program?
5. One big part of the mentoring program includes professional development – learning about Danielson's framework, analyzing your teaching, monitoring your progress, and discussing changes in your teaching practice with your mentor. Could you describe how, or if, these learning opportunities influenced your teaching practice?
 - a. Did this learning process change your thoughts about what it means to be a teacher?
 - b. How was the learning process different from student teaching?
 - c. What would you say are the three things that you will continue to focus on as a professional learner?
6. When you think back to your first months of teaching and compare them to the end of the school year, how would you describe changes that taken place in terms of what you have learned or what you do in the classroom?
 - a. How did participating in the mentoring program influence these changes?
 - b. Do you think you would have made the same changes if you had not had a mentor?
 - c. What parts of Danielson's Framework did you seem to focus on most often during your meetings with your mentor?
7. How do you imagine your future as a professional?
 - a. Do you plan to stay in the teaching profession? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you plan to continue teaching in a small school? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you plan to continue teaching in North Dakota? Why or why not?
 - d. How would you describe your ideal teaching position?
8. Would you advise other new teachers to participate in the mentoring program? Please explain.

Well, our time is up. Thank you so much for answering these questions! Remember that I will send the summary of this interview to you by e-mail sometime before the end of October. Once again, I want you to know that the names that were mentioned will not be included in the transcript. If you have any questions or think of other things that you would like to add, feel free to call or e-mail me. I will give you my contact information.

I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you when it is completed.

This protocol is based on a sample protocol described by Creswell (2012).

Asynchronous interview protocol

This correspondence will be sent to up to sixteen participants who will be purposively selected from the pool of willing volunteers. Depending on the distribution of willing volunteers, the goal will be to select four participants from each quadrant. I will send letters of informed consent to the participants who are selected to participate in the e-mail interviews. Once they return the signed consent, I will send the following message along with an attached copy of their signed letter of informed consent.

Project: Teaching on the Prairie: Participation in the NDTSS mentoring program and the experience and effectiveness of new teachers in small, rural schools

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I know that you have read about the study when you signed the informed letter of consent last fall. I am also attaching a copy of that letter to this e-mail. If you have any questions, please send me e-mail or call me. My contact information is included below and on the attached letter of informed consent.

Purpose of the study and e-mail interview:

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between participation in the NDTSS program and any change in the experience and practice of new teachers in small rural schools. Although I have collected, and will analyze, other data from the year, it is not possible to truly understand the experience of NDTSS participants' first year of teaching without having the opportunity to hear what the participants have to say. Therefore, not only do I greatly appreciate your participation, I want you to know that you are contributing to this study in a very important way.

The individuals and sources of data being collected:

I have sent the same questions via e-mail to fifteen other teachers who also agreed to participate in this study. In addition, eight teachers were selected from willing volunteers for a face-to face or telephone interview to respond to the same questions I am asking you in this e-mail.

I will analyze the responses to the interview questions to look for common and unique themes that describe the experience of rural teachers who participated in the NDTSS program during the past school year. In addition, I have collected samples of conference logs and levels of performance rubrics from other first-year teacher/mentor pairs who agreed to participate in this study. By analyzing all of the data, I hope to be able to enhance the understanding of how participation in the NDTSS program affects the teaching experience.

Handling of the data to protect confidentiality

To protect your confidentiality and the confidentiality of your mentor, I will use pseudonyms and only describe your school in terms of the state quadrant and general size

of the school. I ask that you try to refrain from naming your mentor as you answer these interview questions, but if you do, please rest assured that I will change it to a pseudonym when I transfer your responses to a Microsoft Word document. The e-mail address to which you will send any correspondence about this interview is designated for the sole purpose of this study. I will not share your e-mail address with anyone, and I will delete this account at the end of the study. I will keep a copy of your responses in an electronic and paper file, but I will not use any identifying information about you or any other people you mention in the transcript or study. When I am done with the responses to this interview, I will place a copy of it and the transcript in a locked box or file, which will be stored in my home for at least 5 years, according to Walden University's regulations. I will destroy the transcripts by shredding and I will destroy the digital copies by deleting them after that time. Although I will not share names or schools with the NDTSS coordinator, I will invite her to review summaries of my findings as an extra assurance that I have not breached the confidentiality of any new teachers, mentors, or schools in the study.

I will keep a copy of your e-mail response to the interview questions, and I will transfer your response to a Microsoft Word document before I begin to analyze the data. I will also e-mail you a copy of my preliminary summary of your interview. This is called a member-check. I will ask you to look it over to see if my analysis is consistent with what you meant. After receiving your feedback, I will make necessary changes before moving forward with the analysis. If you do not respond with feedback after 10 days, I will move forward with analysis.

Length of responses:

Please feel free to answer the questions in as much detail as you choose. You do not have to answer every question, but know that your responses will contribute to the strength of this study.

The format of this e-mail interview centers on the seven main questions. Beneath each main question, I have asked a few optional, follow-up questions. Please answer the follow-up questions if they apply to your situation, but if they do not fit your teaching experience, it is fine to skip them and just explain your experience, insight, and ideas below the main question.

I look forward to sharing the results of this study with you when it is completed.

Questions:

1. Please explain why you decided to pursue a teaching career.
 - a. Why did you want to be a teacher?
 - b. What grade/subject did you want to teach?
 - c. Did your teaching experience match your expectations?

2. Would you please describe your teaching assignment this past year?
 - a. What grade and/or subjects did you teach?
 - b. Did you have any extra-curricular assignments?
3. Since one focus of this study centers on teaching in rural schools, please describe your experience teaching in a rural school.
 - a. Did you ever attend a rural school as a student?
 - b. Did you live in the same town as the school where you taught?
 - c. What were the benefits of teaching in a small school?
 - d. What were the challenges of teaching in a small school?
4. Would you please describe working with a mentor for your first year?
 - a. When did you find out that you would have a mentor?
 - b. Were you happy to hear this?
 - c. How often did you and your mentor meet?
 - d. Was your mentor in the same school?
 - e. How similar was your mentor's teaching assignment to yours?
 - f. What was the best part of working with the mentor?
 - g. Were there any drawbacks to participating in the process?
 - h. Looking back on the year, how would you evaluate your role in the mentoring program?
5. One big part of the mentoring program includes professional development – learning about Danielson's framework, analyzing your teaching, monitoring your progress, and discussing changes in your teaching practice with your mentor. Could you describe how, or if, these learning opportunities influenced your teaching practice?
 - a. Did this learning process change your thoughts about what it means to be a teacher?
 - b. How was the learning process different from student teaching?
 - c. What would you say are the three things that you will continue to focus on as a professional learner?
6. When you think back to your first months of teaching and compare them to the end of the school year, how would you describe changes that taken place in terms of what you have learned or what you do in the classroom.
 - a. How did participating in the mentoring program influence these changes?
 - b. Do you think you would have made the same changes if you had not had a mentor?
 - c. What parts of Danielson's Framework did you seem to focus on most often during your meetings with your mentor?
7. How do you imagine your future as a professional?
 - a. Do you plan to stay in the teaching profession? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you plan to continue teaching in a small school? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you plan to continue teaching in North Dakota? Why or why not?
 - d. How would you describe your ideal teaching position?
8. Would you advise other new teachers to participate in the mentoring program? Please explain.

9. If I have follow-up questions, could I contact you for clarification or further information via e-mail?

Thank you so much for answering these questions! If you have additional information you would like to share, please write it in the space below:

I will send the summary of this interview to you by e-mail sometime before the end of October so you can do a member check.

Once again, I want you to know that the names that were mentioned will not be included in the transcript. If you have any questions or think of other things that you would like to add, feel free to call or e-mail me. I will give you my contact information.

This protocol is based on a sample protocol described by Creswell (2012).