TEACHING THE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF FIRST YEAR

SCHOOLTEACHERS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the challenging experience of first-year teachers at existing classical charter schools in the United States of America. Maslow's theory of human motivation provided the guiding framework into how early year teachers can be effectively supported in schools to prevent attrition, which can have a negative effect on student achievement. This qualitative design utilized a case study approach from two different classical charter schools in the United States of America and featured interviews, journal entries, and the review of first year physical artifacts from ten teachers who are no further than three years removed from their first-year teaching. The data collected were analyzed through a process of coding to review and understand the main themes shared among the experience of the teachers and sought to answer the central research question of "What are the experiences of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?" From this process, three specific themes related to supporting teachers through their difficult first year emerged: beginning anxieties, "work begets love," and self-actualization. Participants who remained in the profession all achieved a level of self-actualization that contributed to their decision to remain teaching. This information can help school leaders implement effective strategies to teach and support teachers from the very beginning of their careers.

Keywords: first-year teachers, classical charter schools, teacher retention

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Acknowledgments

I will be forever grateful for the support of many faculty members at Liberty University. I am grateful to Dr. Brian Jones who provided support and encouragement during one of my lowest times in the program. Thank you to Dr. Meredith Park for taking the time to help me understand the process by answering my many questions so I could begin with the end in mind. Dr. Jeanne DuBard was a wonderful and supportive committee member who provided helpful feedback throughout the process. Most of all, my sincerest appreciation to Dr. Jonathan Bracewell who was a wonderful chair, not only because of the godly example he provided as a person, but also because his supportive nature, constructive feedback, and genuine character are traits that I also aspire to each day.

My wife Nichole and three young children were steadfast in their love, support, and patience. This process was completed because of the teamwork foundational to our marriage and Nichole has never wavered in her love and support of me in the eleven blessed years we have been married. I am also grateful to the many friends who provided support and encouragement throughout the highs and the lows of this experience.

Despite the personal ambition to complete a PhD, I am reminded that ultimately, all what we do is for the glory of God and His work in our lives. My prayer is that Jesus would use my experience for his purpose.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:35-37)

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Charter Management Organization (CMO)

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teachers often consider their first year among their most challenging, if not the most challenging, over their career. A casual discussion with teachers about their beginning years may invoke colloquial references to this "trial by fire" or "sink or swim" experience (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). While preparation courses and programs can be helpful, ultimately new teachers must learn to navigate an often-under-appreciated profession that is demanding from various stakeholders (Wilhelm, 2020). The growth of charter schools, publicly funded schools with private oversight, has been met with increasingly firm opposition from proponents of traditional public schools, due mostly their siphoning away of funding that public schools would normally receive (Ladd, 2019). While charter schools at large have experienced success, they have also had their own struggles especially higher teacher turnover specifically among teachers new to the profession (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2020). Educational research has shown that high teacher turnover, especially among beginning teachers, is indicative of an unhealthy school culture or working conditions that negatively impacts academic results (Nguyen et al., 2020). This research study explores some of the data on teacher retention in charter schools, specifically within the growing classical charter school movement, and seeks solutions based off the work of noted psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) and his *Theory of Human Motivation.* Maslow's (1943) ideas offer support for teachers in their first year that if implemented correctly, could provide leaders with effective structures to help beginning teachers succeed.

Background

The origins of the Western concept of education begin with the great Greek philosopher-minds of Socrates and Plato who believed that the purpose of education and the role of teachers

is "that education makes good men, and that good men act nobly" (Plato, n.d.). In the American

context, education continues the Western tradition of playing a pivotal role in the teaching and

spreading of knowledge for the good of society and the betterment of its citizens. America's

second President John Adams wrote that "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused

generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and

liberties" suggesting that Plato's view of the purpose of education was needed to preserve the

principles of freedom and liberty (Adams, 1780). The modernization of American society,

especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, led to the push for formalized teacher college

and preparation programs to ensure the competencies and qualifications of those entrusted with

such a critical responsibility from the beginning of their teaching careers. Fantilli and McDougall

(2009) cite the first year of teaching as the most challenging as it often determines the likelihood

of teacher success down the road. They observed that first-year teachers uniquely possess the

same responsibility as more experienced teachers when it comes to instruction, learning, and

managing their classrooms. This "sink or swim" mentality can make early year teachers feel like

failures due to the challenge of working with students, parents, and administrators, underlying a

reason why so many are leaving the profession after their first few years (Fantilli & McDougall,

2009). To provide solutions for these problems, researchers can utilize the theoretical framework

provided by Maslow (1943). These ideas provide a helpful understanding of human needs and

motivation to ensure that teachers can thrive because their most basic needs, personally and

professionally, are prioritized and met in a genuine manner.

Historical Context

Education has played a vital role in nearly every civilization since the beginning of

recorded history (Bowen, 1972). Oelkers (2001) noted that the Greek concept of education, as

driven by Plato, may be considered as the "cause or ground for the change of society, culture, and individuals" (Oelkers, 2001, p. 11176). The belief that education was necessary to reform, improve, and maintain society through virtue and knowledge permeated Western civilization (Power, 1991). The early Christian church would later embrace the concept that education served "as a voice of God" for truth and against heresy throughout the western world, from the Middle Ages to the Reformation (Oelkers, 2001, p. 11176). Oelkers (2001) identifies the work of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the ideas of Romanticism as shifting the primary emphasis of education toward the development of the actual fulfillment of the child. Irrelevant to the period, education at its most fundamental level continues to drive some form of social change and reform regardless of what educational theory or philosophical underpinnings one may possess (Bowen, 1972). As seen throughout the history of education within the Western tradition, teachers were seen as fulfilling the critical role of helping to shape society through the instruction of students in both knowledge and virtue (Powers, 1991).

This influence ultimately carried into the American founding which demonstrated a commitment to education, including and especially public education, via the growth of schools to reach a wider audience of citizens. The American system of local, public education is largely shaped by the work of James Carter, a leader of the common school movement which served as the foundation for today's traditional public schools (Powers, 1991). Carter sought to ensure that these "common schools" could provide an education for the average American and also worked to ensure that colleges prepared teachers for this tremendous task (Powers, 1991). Laws such as the Massachusetts High School Act of 1827 required towns above a population of four thousand to teach a mixture of practical and classical coursework including: history, bookkeeping, algebra, geometry, surveying, Greek and Latin, rhetoric, and logic (Powers, 1991). Similar laws were

passed throughout the other states as Americans recognized that teachers would need to be well-prepared to instruct students. By the mid to late 19th century, as America's population grew and expanded, colleges and universities soon established teacher colleges to specialize in this task.

These foundational concepts of reform and societal impact overlap with the origin, implementation, and present-day expansion of charter schools. While the history of public education in America can be traced all the way back to the founding of Boston Latin School in 1635, issues of access, segregation, the right of parents to choose their child's school, and the corresponding barriers to entry caused systemically or driven by academic ability, have long been part of the American story (Shuls, 2022). Born out of the American public education reform movement of the late 20th century, Wells et al., (2002) argued that charter schools originally hoped to reform what was believed to be a broken educational system by embracing an "antigovernment" belief in local control of schools (versus state and national control) and flexibility and against unions (p. 345). The American charter school movement began to take shape in the 1980's with President Ronald Reagan's push toward public education reform. A commission authorized by President Reagan produced the report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) in which the nation's public school system was essentially deemed a failure due to its lagging test scores compared to other first world nations (Tanner, 2021). Tanner (2021) suggested Reagan's friendship with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher influenced his interest in creating charter schools, or another tier of public education driven by the free market concept of private governance and oversight, based on Great Britain's system of schooling. The original concept for charter schools was to be a publicly funded "alternative public schools that would allow for greater experimentation and innovation within the public school (Gleason, 2021, p. 1053). Although originally supported by President

Reagan's administration, as further noted by Gleason (2021), charter schools have enjoyed

bipartisan support from American presidents including President Barack Obama who believed

charter schools provided "innovative approaches" for the public school system (p. 1054).

The first charter schools opened in the early 1990's and have continued to spread rapidly

across the country. Harris and Chen (2022) found that 7% of the nation's public-school students

are now enrolled in charter schools, although this number can be as high as 40% in certain larger

cities. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2023) estimates that there are currently

approximately 7,800 charter schools across 45 states (2023). Approximately 3.7 million children

attend these charter schools in which there are around 205,600 teachers (The National Alliance

for Public Charter Schools, 2023). The rise in charter school enrollment has been opposed from

those who believe that charter school competition has negatively impacted public school funding

and relationships with public school districts despite the original intention for a more

collaborative working relationship based on experimentation and innovation between charter and

traditional public schools (Harris & Chen, 2022). Harris and Chen (2022) still found that overall

charter schools demonstrated a general trend of improvement versus traditional public scores in

test scores, graduation rates, and other key data points although they acknowledge that a

significant amount of data and research is still needed to understand the overall effectiveness of

charter schools.

Social Context

Due to relaxed licensing requirements in many states, charter schools have created the

opportunity for individuals who may lack prior educational experience or educational training to

enter the profession. Teacher preparation in America has changed significantly since the

common school movement. Colonial America education viewed the profession of teaching like

that of a minister, where an emphasis on moral character was held in higher esteem over knowledge of the subject matter or of pedagogy (Angus, 2001). In the first half of the 19th century, teacher licensing moved from primarily the local level, if it happened at all, to the state level (Angus, 2001). Similarly, the responsibility for teacher training also shifted from smaller state-subsided academies to high schools, college courses, and eventually teacher colleges (Angus, 2001). These teacher colleges embraced a similar approach to curriculum and pedological instruction ranging from core content and subjects to classroom management and teaching practices and methods (Nguyen, 2018). These trends have continued to the present day where many current programs teach foundational courses in subjects related to psychology and cognitive learning coinciding with the rise of the modern social sciences (Nguyen, 2018). Nguyen (2018) also notes that field work soon became another component of preparation programs to further prepare students for the real-life experience in the classroom.

While enrolling in a teacher preparation program and obtaining certification remains the conventional route for those pursuing a career in teaching, the growth of charter schools has offered alternate pathways into the profession for many individuals (Richter et al., 2021). Guthery and Bailes (2022) note that alternative certification options for charter schoolteachers have expanded although they continue to be regulated on a state-by-state basis. Pivovarova and Powers (2022) agreed with this finding in that some states do not require charter schoolteachers to be certified or only require a certain percentage of the faculty to be certified; however, they also note that research suggests teachers with more formal preparation are less likely to turnover as teachers.

Regardless of whether future teachers complete traditional or alternative certification programs, recent years have seen increased challenges for teachers in their profession. Even

before the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of potential teachers completing preparation

programs had been declining. The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

recently released a report noting that over the past decade, enrollment in teacher preparation

programs has decreased by almost a third as of the 2018-2019 school year (Chirichella, 2022).

Education Week, a news source for education, cited poor teacher working conditions including

staff shortages, academic and social-emotional learning loss from the pandemic, and the

politicization of curriculum as the primary reasons for the reduction of potential teachers (Will,

2022). While research is still being conducted to examine the effects of the pandemic on the

American education system, concerns have long been present regarding the recruitment and

retention of teachers. Further research on first-year teacher retention may determine if the

teacher's lack preparation or the stress of the job, or yet another unidentified factor, may affect

their decision to remain in the profession. These ideas can benefit school leaders today who are

receiving teachers with the hope that they can help them become excellent in their profession for

the longer term.

Theoretical Context

In 1943, Abraham Maslow published his book titled *A Theory of Human Motivation*

which sought to explain the reason for human action as determined by human needs, from basic

to higher level. Maslow's ideas provide the theoretical framework for this study, as the teacher

decision to remain in the profession may be driven by their motivation to continue teaching,

determined by how effectively or not effectively their needs are met within their school setting.

Influential educational theorist Arthur Combs (1972) suggested that teacher preparation

programs *must* include Maslow's (1943) concepts of security and acceptance. Combs observed

that until a young teacher had their basic needs met in the classroom setting (like effective

classroom management), they were unlikely to have the ability to focus on higher order concepts

that may have been covered in their preparation courses (such as curriculum theory).

Considerable study and debate exist over whether teacher preparation programs have set up

teachers to be successful in their educational careers. Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) have noted

that despite efforts by the individual states to require certification and attempts to certify at the

national level through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, teacher

certification (and thus preparation) has not been carefully thought through and may not be

effective or even necessary. While Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) are not suggesting against the

idea of ensuring that teachers are qualified and ready to enter the classroom, they do suggest that

teacher preparation programs and licensing exams at this time may not be the most effective or

predictive of teacher or student achievement success. Darling-Hammond et al., (2001) shortly

thereafter Goldhaber and Brewer, published their own study disagreeing with Goldhaber and

Brewer's research and conclusions suggesting that certification and preparation, which included

training in pedagogy and theory, provided beginning teachers a critical and essential

understanding of student needs and their responsibility as teachers in the classroom.

Since their time of publication, Maslow's (1943) ideas have been studied in how they

affect students and teachers separately and independently. Ansorger (2021) applied Maslow's

(1943) theory to educational reform efforts, especially for students traditionally underserved and

marginalized, arguing that students cannot learn without their basic physical and socio-emotional

needs being met through culturally responsive teachers. While Ansorger (2021) does not

specifically address the preparation of teachers in the early stages of the career, she does suggest

that successful teachers are ones who are highly qualified and trained within the concepts

provided by Maslow's (1943) theory. Similarly, Ozeren et al. (2020) do not specifically

reference Maslow (1943), but their focus on developing teacher self-efficacy and using motivating language from principals and other school leaders is very similar to Maslow's (1943) concept of combating stress through building belonging and esteem needs. This research topic focused specifically on the experience of first-year teachers in a charter school regardless of whether they completed a preparation program although participants were asked to identify whether they completed a preparation program. Recommendations for support were provided to school leaders who oversee first-year teachers especially in a classical charter school setting. While charter schools are still relatively new to the story of American public education, classical charter schools are an even more recent development that continue to grow rapidly, thus the need for further research and discussion.

Problem Statement

The problem is that many beginning teachers in charter schools will leave the profession after their first few years. These higher rates of turnover have been documented by Gulosino et al. (2019), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2020), and Pivovarova and Powers (2022). Furthermore, teacher retention is considered a sign of a healthy school culture which administrators from all types of schools strive to establish in their schools (Nielsen & Taggart, 2021). Both Nguyen et al. (2020) and Redding and Henry (2019) have found that this high turnover within charter schools is indicative potentially of the much larger problem of an unhealthy school culture. While the first year of teaching may be challenging due to the learning curve and responsibilities that naturally accompany the profession, the ability for schools to retain teachers beyond their first year also assumes they have been properly supported and coached, especially if concepts from Maslow's (1943) theory of needs are incorporated. McCluskey (2022) noted the especially high levels of physical and emotional exhaustion and stress which charter schoolteachers often

experience. Researchers have also found that teacher turnover has negative effects on student learning leading to lower achievement results (Burkhauser, 2017). While charter schools are still a relatively new phenomena in the American public education system, studies show their enrollments continue to climb signaling that many families may be interested in a public option outside of the traditional public school (Spees & Lauen, 2019). As a result, charter school administrators may be especially curious to find solutions that support teacher retention amidst the news headlines emphasizing teacher shortages and stresses that interfere with student learning (Mullen et al., 2021; Larkin et al., 2022).

Additionally, this research study focused especially on the growing classical charter school movement. Charter school research continues to be dynamic, and the growing classical charter school movement presents an opportunity where further research will build upon existing work to determine their effectiveness at teacher retention. Research was conducted in two classical charter schools and focused on interviews, written responses, and physical documents and artifacts from teachers no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching. The study hopes to utilize teachers who are diverse in background and who teach different subjects and grade levels within the K-12 setting. Teachers were asked to reflect on their first year including their successes and failures, support or lack of support, and why they persevered beyond the first year. This feedback will hopefully lead to tangible steps school leaders can use to build a healthy school culture, for their first-year teachers and beyond.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the challenging experience of first-year teachers at existing classical charter schools in the United States of America**.** Participants who are no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching were

asked to reflect on their most positive and challenging experiences to determine what caused them to remain in the teaching profession.

Significance of the Study

By learning from the perspectives of beginning teachers, significant theoretical contributions to educational research will occur through various ways. This study is especially focused on the experiences of teachers within charter classical settings and will build upon the existing body of knowledge of charter school working conditions and educator retention. Maslow's (1943) framework for human needs and motivation provides guidance for the needs of first-year teachers that effective school leaders can use to build a supportive and professional school culture.

The theoretical significance of this study will focus on the application of Maslow's (1943) *Theory of Human Motivation* to the experiences of first-year teachers. While Maslow's (1943) concepts have been incorporated into research designs focused on both students and teachers, the growing and changing world of charter schools, especially those with a focus on classical teaching presents an opportunity to expand upon the existing research. Recent studies of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy have shown the ability to apply its ideas to a "framework for understanding these [human] needs, system impacts on society, and what motivates humans" (Ryan et al., 2020, p. 625). Maslow's theory is applicable to teachers, especially in their early years, who may experience especially challenging and unique circumstances while adapting to their profession.

The empirical significance of this study focused on Maslow's (1943) concepts and their application on how school leaders support teachers, especially in their first year. Additionally, teacher preparation programs could also understand what support might be helpful to assist

teachers as they prepare for their full-time classroom roles. The site settings were selected to contribute and support the growing body of research on charter schools and their organizational and instructional conditions (Dallavis & Berends, 2023). Additionally, this study is influenced by Fisher and Royster (2016) who examined Maslow's (1943) needs through math teachers. Like Fisher and Royster (2016) interviews took place with teachers and sought to answer questions about stress, retention, preparation for teaching, school culture, and the overall experience of teaching. Unlike Fisher and Royster (2016), who used an explanatory design method, this research design utilized a case study approach to explore teacher experiences beyond mathematics teachers. As a result, contributions were made to the existing body of knowledge in charter schools and will build into further study of charter classical schools.

The ideas within the study contain practical implications for many stakeholders both within the confines of classical charter schools and in the understanding of schools in general. Although the results will be useful for those in the charter classical sector there are many implications for all schools regarding first-year and beyond teacher retention, the establishment of a healthy school culture, and what best practices school leaders should put in place for their teachers. Thomas et al. (2020) found that school principals can have a positive and meaningful effect on their school culture when they develop professional relationships with their teachers, which can build self-efficacy especially in new teachers. Furthermore, school leaders should be empowered to understand the needs of their teachers in their own unique contexts (Sulit, 2020). Previous studies have shown that teacher retention and positive school culture help students from all backgrounds learn (Mullen et al., 2021; Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). These conclusions add to the conversation by specifically emphasizing how classical, charter schools can learn from other settings by avoiding some all-too-common mistakes. Research has found that developing

the intrinsic motivation of teachers to remain committed to their profession is a critical component of teacher retention (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022). While the early years of teaching will always remain an adjustment, this study can assist school leaders in developing intentional practices to help encourage perseverance and retention among their faculty.

Research Questions

Early teacher turnover can be a sign of an unhealthy school culture that lacks proper support for teachers (Redding & Henry, 2019). Utilizing Maslow's (1943) framework of human needs and motivations, the researcher sought to understand the experience of first-year teachers specifically in a classical charter school setting. This information will assist school leaders in creating and supporting school cultures to help teachers in their first year be successful.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Sub-Question One

Which types of professional development are effective for first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Sub-Question Two

Which types of administrative support are effective for first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Sub-Question Three

How can mentoring and peer relationships improve the experience of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Definitions

Terms pertinent to this study are listed below:

1. *Charter schools* – are publicly funded schools with open enrollment and free tuition that allow for a private board of directors to set decision making in areas such as curriculum, instruction, and operations (Walters, 2018). Such institutions operate by contract with an authorizer who is a public entity and seek to provide alternatives in public education to families as a means of education reform (Tong et al., 2023). As a result, charter schools often have more flexibility to deviate from traditional public schools in their decision making although this feature comes with greater accountability in performance and governance (Tong et al., 2023).

2. *First year* of teaching – as defined by Larkin et al., (2022) is a teaching in their first full year of classroom teaching, whether they completed a preparation program or entered through the public or private sector as a novice teacher.

3. *Administrative support* – Burkhauser (2017) cites administrative support as looking like the following "teacher time use, physical environment, teacher empowerment/school leadership, professional development" (p. 126). Effective school leaders are ethical, are committed to equity and devoted to the students, provide leadership in the curriculum, are effectively involved in recruiting, hiring, and training teachers, provide mission and vision for the school, maintain safe and healthy school culture, reach out and include families and other stakeholders, support teacher growth by demonstrating trust, utilize professional development, and wisely managing school resources (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

4. *School culture* – is the "ethos" and environment of a school driven by how leadership promotes teacher learning and support. Specifically, schools with healthier school culture experience higher levels of teacher collaboration while emphasizing a continuous pursuit

of knowledge within the school community (Schipper et al., 2020). School culture is also the relationships among teachers that drive discussion, respect other opinions, and build positive relationships with students through these differences and successes alike (Liu et al. 2021).

5. *Classical schools* – emphasize instruction within the Western heritage and philosophy through traditional teaching, an emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences, and instruction in Latin (White & Huang, 2022). Many classical schools also utilize the Socratic method of instruction and have a trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) model of education that is ultimately based on the idea of knowledge for its own sake and the pursuit of virtue through the process of education (McShane & Hatfield, 2015; White & Huang, 2022).

Summary

Education has long played a vital role in the preservation and continuation of a healthy society and as a result, teachers, and their preparation, has long been considered carefully, from the ancient Greeks to present day teacher colleges. While many teachers find their first year to be especially challenging, schools can provide support structures that build confidence and perseverance. These traits build self-actualization, a concept influenced by the work of Abraham Maslow (1943) and his theory of human motivation. As a component of the education reform movement, charter schools have added a new dynamic to public education. One increasingly popular model in charter schools is the classical approach, similarly to how the ancient Greeks viewed the purpose of education. However, the growing trend of turnover, especially among early year teachers, threatens the academic results of many charter schools suggesting that school leaders must assertively respond to this problem. Maslow's (1943) theory provides a framework

of how effective leaders can teach their teachers strategies to help them persevere and serve their

students to the very best of their ability.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

While the experience of being a first-year teacher will likely be challenging, the ability to persevere is a key factor in the decision to remain in the teaching profession. Furthermore, the capacity of schools to provide additional support to all teachers, regardless of tenure, is indicative of a healthy school culture based on support and professional growth (Gawlik, 2018). This chapter will explore the literature on the work experiences of first-year teachers in charter school settings by first establishing its context within public schools, which categorically include charter schools. By utilizing Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a theoretical framework, new teacher burnout, which results in increased teacher turnover especially in charter schools, will be explored. Through a proper application of Maslow's ideas, school leaders can provide support to first-year teachers to help combat this turnover especially focusing on those in the unique setting of charter schools. While some research has been conducted on teacher working conditions within charter school settings (such as Naslund & Ponomariov, 2019), the rise of the relatively new classical charter school movement suggests that further study is needed in classical school settings where a strong emphasis is placed on teaching and learning for its own sake.

Theoretical Framework

To explore whether the needs of first-year teachers are being met to set them up for success in the classroom, the profoundly influential framework of Abraham Maslow (1943) will be utilized. In his 1943 publication *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Maslow, an American psychologist and philosopher, sought to answer fundamental questions regarding human nature, decision making, whether these factors have changed, and the implications of the answers to

these ideas on our social and political world (Abulof, 2017). As a result of his work, Acevedo

(2018) notes that Maslow became known as the "father of humanistic psychology" (p. 742) and

his concepts continue to have a well-known, interdisciplinary influence within America's culture

of ideas.

Maslow's theory (1943) contained five needs that drive human behavior. See Figure 1

below for a visual pyramid diagram of Maslow's hierarchy:

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

These needs form a pyramid beginning with the most basic demands at the bottom and climbing

to those least necessary for survival but the most important for human thriving, at the top. The

bottom layer is composed of physiological needs, such as food and shelter, which Maslow (1943)

suggests is the "most prepotent" because in an extreme situation where a human has no needs

being met, they would firstly need food more than anything else (p. 373). The next layer relates

to safety. Maslow (1943) suggests that humans, especially children, need an environment that is

"safe, orderly, predictable... in which unexpected, unmanageable, or other dangerous things do

not happen," thus it is the role of parents to primarily provide for both the physiological and safety needs of their children (p. 378). Maslow (1943) states that third layer of love needs pertain to "both giving *and* receiving love" and can happen only when "physiological and safety needs are fairly well gratified" (pp. 380-381). Furthermore, the fourth layer of esteem needs are derived from "self-respect" based on "real capacity, achievement, and respect from others" (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). Finally, Maslow (1943) suggests that these characteristics, in addition to respect from others, are innate and ultimately lead to the need for self-actualization the fifth and final layer at the top of the pyramid. This need will only be satisfied when we reach our potential or ideal, these individuals Maslow (1943) refers to as "basically satisfied people" from whom "we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness" (Maslow, p. 383).

The influence of Maslow's (1943) work on the importance of teacher needs, from basic to higher level, has been well-documented in educational research. Wilhelm et al. (2020) notes that the first-year experience for teachers may result in feeling "stressed out" which can negatively affect even basic human needs. Similarly, McLean et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of physical and emotional safety for teachers who are likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety from the many demands associated with teaching. In the context of teaching, love needs may be derived from effective mentoring and feedback from others toward first-year teachers. Wexler (2020) found that "feedback that generated learning and growth" could help encourage and sustain first-year teachers especially as they are navigating school-specific settings and challenges (p. 182). In building esteem needs, Mendez et al. (2020) agrees with McLean et al. (2020) and Wilhelm et al. (2020) regarding the seriousness of teacher stress and burnout suggesting that schools should prioritize positive working conditions and teacher welfare to combat burnout. Finally, Flushman et al. (2021) emphasizes the creation of teaching

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communities among beginning teachers to assist with fulfilling self-actualization needs and to

establish a great sense of belonging and purpose within the profession. Applying and comparing

Maslow's (1943) concept of needs to teachers can be seen in Figure 2 based off the work of

Fisher and Royster (2016) who sought to understand Maslow's work in their research of math

teachers.

Figure 2

Comparison of Maslow's Original Hierarchy to the Teachers in the Study
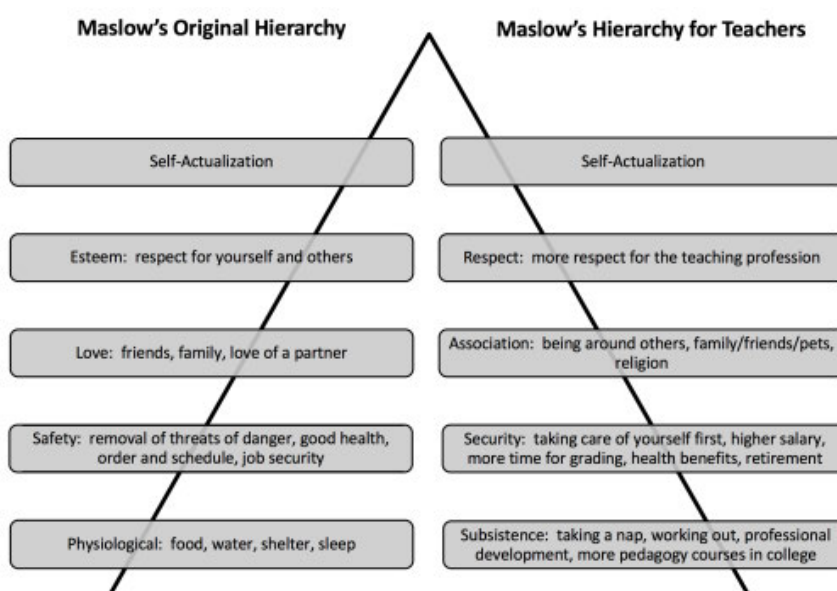
From: Fisher, M. H., & Royster, D. (2016), used with permission.

Initial studies of Maslow's (1943) increasingly popular theory emphasized its application

specifically to teachers. Aspy (1969), a relative contemporary of Maslow, studied the implication

of Maslow's concepts to teacher training especially regarding building self-esteem in the

classroom. Aspy directly applied Maslow's theory to developing best practices in beginning

teacher training. McArdle (1978) shared how he referred to Maslow's ideas following his

promotion to his first principalship to help him facilitate and lead his staff effectively. Weller

(1982) agreed with McArdle's emphasis of principal leadership utilizing Maslow's (1943)

concepts, challenging school leaders to retain teachers by focusing on their needs to avoid their

burnout and dissatisfaction with the profession. School leaders, Weller (1982) suggested, should

ensure teachers have proper supplies, knowledge of school safety protocols and space

requirements, and access to joint decision making and shared goals and expectations. More

recently, Moloantoa and Geyer (2021) applied the theory in South African schools where they

found that teachers who were given time to address their workplace challenges developed the

skills to cope and move toward self-actualization and their true potential as teachers.

Additionally, Maslow's ideas also apply to settings specific to student culture. Demarco

(1998) directly applied Maslow's (1943) ideas to student needs reaffirming a commitment to

establishing and meeting lower-level needs before the higher need of self-actualization could be

met. Deering et al. (2013) examined the enactment of Maslow (1943) theory on middle school

students in New Zealand. This study applied Maslow's (1943) concepts, from the top to the

bottom of the pyramid, suggesting a holistic approach was necessary to building good students

and citizens. The idea that student well-being could also be framed according to Maslow's

(1943) hierarchy has been strengthened by recent scholarly work. In 2021, Mutch coined the

catchphrase "Maslow before Bloom" which refers to "prioritizing student well-being before any

learning can actually happen" (p. 82). This concept references Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) which

provides a foundational framework to guide instruction and learning in American education that

was developed around the same time as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs (Armstrong, 2010).

Mutch's (2021) work focused especially on education during a pandemic and the need to be

sensitive to the needs of students and families during the crisis. Similarly, Ansorger (2021)

directly applied Maslow's (1943) concepts to meeting student needs, in an era of testing and

performance accountability post-pandemic suggesting that students needed more intentional and adaptable support to meet academic expectations.

Additional studies have applied Maslow's (1943) concepts to schools in challenging situations outside of the pandemic's effect on education. Fisher and Crawford (2020) integrated Maslow's (1943) concepts within a struggling school documenting its journey "from school of crisis to distinguished" (Fisher & Crawford, 2020, p. 17). Basford et al., (2021) provided further evidence on the importance of first establishing basic human needs for students by examining how a charter school utilized Maslow's concepts in teacher training and student culture and saw almost immediate improvement among its previously high rates of suspension, expulsion, and drop-out. A study conducted by Noltemeyer et al., (2021) similarly used the application of Maslow's (1943) ideas into a family and student Success Program to address barriers to learning. The results, gathered from data collected from the past thirteen years, showed that interventions based on Maslow's (1943) theory, which addressed basic needs that were deficient, such as access to food, before higher level growth needs, such as academic success, led to increased success by strengthening the school-family partnership. As studies had already shown for teachers, these efforts are examples of Maslow's (1943) ideas which contained great relevance and application to student growth, learning, and success.

The rationale of this research design is to apply Maslow's (1943) concept to first-year teachers specifically so that administrators and other supervising personnel can ensure that their needs are met, even at their most basic level according to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy. By meeting the needs of their teachers, proper coping skills that can encourage teacher retention will be developed. As noted by Wexler (2020), new teachers often find their experience to be isolating due to the lack of support and resources available. New teachers can face higher rates of

burnout and job dissatisfaction resulting from working conditions that may include "insufficient knowledge, skills, and dispositions" and "ineffective school structures and leadership" that highlight differences between what they may have been taught in their educator preparation program versus their experience in the classroom (Flushman et al., 2021, p. 81). When school leaders enact proper supports to ensure these fundamental needs are met, new teacher job satisfaction and willingness to remain in the profession is likely to increase (Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation provides a framework to make sure that first-year teacher needs are all supported, from basic physiological needs, to desirable emotional and love needs, to the highest need for self-actualization. A further gap in the literature exists in classical charter schools to determine how Maslow's (1943) concept manifests on a practical level for teachers new to the profession within this specific setting. As with the work of Fisher and Royster (2016), Maslow's (1943) ideas will provide the lens to explore factors such as first-year teacher stress and coping skills while giving opportunities for school leaders to adequately support their teachers. This support would use Maslow's (1943) human needs hierarchy to retain more effective teachers to best serve the students and families. It would also advance Maslow's (1943) theory by using a case study reflection from teachers on their first year of teaching, providing opportunities for scholars and school leaders to learn how to promote healthy school and teacher cultures.

Related Literature

For many educators, recalling the experience of their first-year teaching often triggers memories of the demands of balancing the expectations demanded by many different stakeholders. The transition into teaching, regardless of background and level of preparation, is

often challenging for beginning teachers. Overwhelmed by the responsibilities and workload, new teachers may be especially prone to burnout. In schools where sufficient support for new teachers is lacking, higher teacher turnover is increasingly likely, which has negative effects on student culture and achievement. By utilizing Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a guide, school leaders can bolster the spirits of their beginning teachers by implementing effective professional development, mentoring, positive peer relationships, and administrative support. While charter schools are relatively new innovations within the public-school sector, they are especially affected by teacher turnover, working conditions, and burnout due to their limited resources. As charter schools continue to grow and expand across the nation, one problem is that many teachers may be entering the teaching profession, set up for failure. Teachers who experience such difficult first years, and do not develop effective strategies to manage its demands, may choose to ultimately leave the profession and cause greater strain upon the educational system for our country's future citizens.

New Teacher Burnout

Many experienced and successful educators will most likely relate to the challenges of teaching, especially in the early years of their career. New teachers must quickly learn to be proficient in managing challenging classrooms and other techniques to work effectively with children across all spectrums and abilities (Beisly et al., 2023). Furthermore, new teachers must often work hard to earn the respect of their students (Berkowitz et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has and continues to exacerbate the burnout teachers are experiencing due to the loss of student learning from school closures (Marshall et al., 2023). Components such as high stakes standardized testing can add additional stress to first-year teachers as Brown (2015) found that existing preparation and induction practices were not sufficient to prepare teachers for this

specific challenge. A study by Benevene et al. (2019) established that teaching should be considered a high-risk profession for burnout and other stress-related health issues. This burnout, as established by Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) has a direct connection to teacher turnover. To be an effective teacher requires great skill and noticeable progress on the "steep learning curve" of providing quality instruction, handling student behavior, mastering the curriculum and content, and managing the many extra demands of being a teacher (Wilhelm et al., 2020, p.99. Beginning teachers who are not provided with the skills, support, and strategies to meet these demands are more likely to turn over to a new school or profession (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022). Further additional responsibilities outside of the classroom, including paperwork and meetings with colleagues, parents, and administrators, can be further overwhelming for new teachers. An earlier study by Stuit and Smith (2010) suggested that the average workweek for teachers often exceeds sixty hours per week. New teachers, who are already at risk of burning out, are also at a higher risk for depression (Méndez et al., 2020). While teacher preparation programs can support and train, Wilhelm et al. (2020) found that they are not solely able to prepare teachers for their eventual school context and classroom experience where they apply what they have learned into practice. At times, the success of the teaching during this adjustment phase may depend on the quality of the preparation program itself (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Challenges of Teacher Turnover

Researchers including Fantilli and McDougall (2009) have raised concerns about the alarming and negative trend of teacher turnover over the past few decades. Burkhauser (2017) found that many contextual and demographic factors of the school including class size, student behavior, salary, location, professional development opportunities, and parent and administrative support may impact a teacher's job satisfaction and retention with the school, charter or public.

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As new teachers may easily experience burnout, school leaders should prioritize support and

retention especially given the troubling data on teacher turnover within public schools. Research

generally establishes that the overall annual turnover rate among American teachers hovers

around the 15-20%, with many teachers leaving within the first few years (Burkhauser, 2017;

Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2020). Burkhauser (2017) also found that the turnover rate in public

schools stands at around 16%. This finding is consistent with Carver-Thomas and Darling-

Hammond (2019) who stated that the turnover rate was 16%, with 8% of teachers leaving the

profession and 8% switching schools. Furthermore, teacher turnover contributes to teacher

shortages, which is only exacerbated by the number of teachers who are also choosing to retire

(Casely-Hayford et al., 2022). Concerningly, additional studies have corroborated this trend

finding that the majority of teacher turnover occurring is not driven by retirements but by

beginning and mid-career teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond,

2019). A closer look at the teachers who are leaving reveals a significant portion of this turnover

occurring while teachers are in the beginning years, generally considered within the first five

years (Thomas et al., 2019). Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) found that the turnover rate among

teachers leaving the profession after the first five years is approximately 20-40%. Similarly,

Ensign et.al (2018) estimated that 41% of beginning teachers will leave after five years, most of

them from low performing schools in both rural and urban settings.

Studies completed by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), Bickmore and

Dowell (2019), and Burkhauser (2017) confirmed that teacher turnover not only results in

disruptions to students but is also costing schools more in hiring and training (nationally into the

billions of dollars) and risks the hiring of weaker teachers, who will likely negatively impact

student learning. Chambers Mack et al., (2019) supports this costly effect of teacher turnover by

estimating the cost to districts and taxpayers to be around seven billion dollars nationally. Sulit (2020) citing the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, estimated that it cost just over $17,500 to replace each teacher who left when considering recruiting, hiring, and training new staff members. Studies by Burkhauser (2017) and Miller and Youngs (2021) both mention some of the potentially positive results of turnover, such as replacing poor teachers, but note that these benefits are ultimately outweighed against the costs as higher turnover drains schools of healthy human and social capital preventing a faculty from ever uniting and becoming cohesive. Sorensen and Ladd (2020) found that teacher turnover comes with additional "hidden" costs related to the loss of good teachers who are then replaced by weaker ones. Specifically, Miller and Youngs (2021) emphasize that a stable relational community among teachers, students, and parents is conducive to student achievement gains. Similarly, studies have shown that the school-based factor that has the most significant impact on student achievement is teacher effectiveness which can be challenging to build in a system of teacher shortages (Nguyen, 2021).

While teacher turnover has a negative effect on student achievement, it is especially detrimental to the most vulnerable students in urban and lower performing schools. Interestingly, a report by the Learning Policy Institute (Cardichon, 2020) found that the number of alternatively prepared teachers in urban schools is growing. Brown (2015) also concluded that teachers in these schools left at a concerningly higher rate within these communities. Similarly, Wiens et al., 2019 stated that teacher turnover is especially high in the first five years and is both detrimental financially to schools and harmful to student achievement especially to lower income students Such districts, often found in larger cities, are composed mostly of non-white students, are often classified as "high needs schools" due to external factors such as poverty, and are

disproportionally funded thus creating unequal access to high quality teachers and curriculum (Grillo & Kier, 2021). Similarly, low performing schools can also be found in rural settings where comparable problems and teacher turnover exist (Mullen et al., 2021). Sadly, Pivovarova and Powers (2022) found that teachers leaving these settings were not leaving the students themselves but rather the difficult working conditions and lack of administrative support within the schools. Holme et al., (2018) also concluded that high needs schools chronically struggled with the turnover cycle and had difficulty improving due to the faculty's continuous instability. Turnover not only negatively affects students of color but prevents teachers from remaining in the profession (White, 2018). Ultimately lower performing, high needs, and urban students are the most adversely affected due to the lack of a stable educational environment for the students who need stability the most (Burkhauser, 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). However, research has been clear that students from across all spectrums in any given school are negatively affected by teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Additional Reasons for Turnover

Researchers have shown several significant factors that contribute to teacher turnover and burnout, especially among first year teachers. Recent increases in national gun violence, a global pandemic, and a politically charged environment have produced both current news articles and scholarly research that highlight teacher turnover as not just an American problem but also a global one (Ingersoll & Tran, 2023). Wiggan et al. (2021) suggest that the lack of competitive salaries within American public education discourage potential teachers away from education in favor of more lucrative careers. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) also cite salary as a significant factor to teacher attrition while also questioning the overall quality of teacher preparation programs and their ability to transition beginning teachers into the profession. One additional

well-publicized factor, especially throughout the 21st century in American education, are the repeated attempts to reform failing schools by increasing pressures on teachers and students to achieve on annual standardized exams (Blank, 2022). While increased accountability for school performance has generally been a bipartisan issue, it has created a further pressurized school environment, especially within failing schools, leading to highly publicized and polarizing teacher strikes (Blanc, 2022). Research has shown that the external ingredients which most negatively affect school culture include accountability and state testing, class size, salaries, and the lack of teacher autonomy (Sutcher et al., 2019).

While external factors play a significant role in teacher job satisfaction, internal factors can also contribute significantly to teacher turnover and retention. Studies including Billingsley and Bettini (2019) explored a further myriad of internal reasons which lead to teacher attrition ultimately suggesting that increasing teacher caseloads and responsibilities have a negative effect on working conditions and teacher perceptions. This finding is consistent with McLean et al. (2020) who noted the influence of school climate and culture to teachers, either positively from schools with high collaboration and professional development, or negatively from schools with burnout and stress due to workload. Chambers Mack et al. (2019) conclude that burnout creates a work environment where teachers feel out of control producing low teacher commitment and involvement, due to poor support, climate, and job control all of which lead to higher turnover rates in schools. These studies suggest that burnout and stress, while especially harmful to new teachers have a detrimental effect on teachers at large. Student culture also plays a significant role in teacher working conditions. Both McLean et al. (2020) and Torres (2016) found that student culture in relation to the effectiveness and faculty buy-in of disciplinary systems in combination with the teacher perceptions of student behavior and academic performance was one

of the most significant internal factors in teacher attrition. In considering predictors such as teacher age, salary, subject area, and school characteristics, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) cite the most accurate predictor of teacher attrition due to working conditions was the lack of perceived administrative support from school leadership. Negative internal and external factors ultimately prevented school leaders from building teacher self-efficacy, resulting in teachers feeling helpless in their situations, because they failed to have their most basic physiological and emotional needs met.

Supports in Relation to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Utilizing Maslow's (1943) framework, school leaders can help their first-year teachers develop effective coping strategies to persevere through the myriad challenges that will accompany the first year. Pivovarova and Powers (2022) found that new teachers need critical support during their first five years of teaching as they have an immense ability to learn and grow at the start of their careers. One key aspect of support Billingsley and Bettini (2019) noted was the importance for teachers to develop coping skills to resolve conflict or challenging situations. Maslow's (1943) framework gives guidance for school leaders when addressing their teacher needs. In first prioritizing physiological needs, leaders should recognize studies by Chambers Mack et al. (2019) and Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) which concluded that teachers were more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, headaches, and cardiovascular disease in addition to mental health issues related to increased anxiety and stress. Regarding safety needs, Berkowitz et al. (2022) connected the importance of a positive school climate to contributing to the emotional welfare of the entire school. School leaders who prioritized this safety need worked to establish a positive and collegial environment, laying the groundwork for both staff and students to feel physically and emotionally secure and achieve stronger academic results

(Berkowitz et al., 2022). Regarding love needs, Grillo and Kier (2021) found that teachers within environments of trust, respect, and care are more conducive to flourishing in their setting, even within high needs or challenging demographics. Finally, when it comes to esteem and efficacy needs, schools that took time to build a collaborative school culture, based on inquiry and active learning, saw improvements in teacher self-efficacy and student achievement (Schipper et al., 2020). Nickel et.al (2021) found that schools which focused on work-life balance and supporting teachers by assisting them with a positive and reflective mindset helped develop self-efficacy in early year teachers. Granziera and Perera (2019) found that teacher efficacy and job satisfaction are intrinsically linked, implying that when teachers reach this final need in Maslow's pyramid, retention is likely to improve.

School leaders can work to ensure these needs are addressed by implementing effective strategies to support first-year teachers including professional development, mentoring, facilitating positive peer relationships, and leading their teachers skillfully and effectively. Wilhelm et al. (2020) demonstrated that successful first-year teachers organically built their own professional network of administrators, mentors, and other teachers leading to the establishment of a healthy school climate and culture of support. Whether from other peers or school leaders, multiple studies including Wilhelm (2020) and McLean et al. (2020), suggest that the meeting of love needs, especially those centered around human interaction, is important for first-year teachers to avoid the isolation and feelings of negativity that can lead to unhappiness and turnover. By first prioritizing lower needs on the pyramid and then building to higher needs, school leaders can support new teachers as they climb toward a greater sense of self-actualization (Flushman et al., 2021).

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Mentoring

Extensive educational research has shown that providing mentor support for new teachers creates opportunities for ongoing support in their transition to the classroom. Mentoring that is driven by school leadership can serve as a welcome source of encouragement for new teachers (Chan, 2014). This concept is especially true for teachers entering the profession through alternative preparation programs (Matsko et.al 2022). A study conducted by Wexler (2020) advocated for the creation of mentor teachers to provide feedback and support for all new teachers regardless of their prior preparation. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) found that mentoring was an important factor to most beginning teachers whom they studied who chose to remain teaching. In an ideal situation, Autcher et al., (2019) stressed the importance that the mentor teacher ideally be in the same subject area as the new teacher with shared and scheduled planning time. Without the support of a mentor teachers, beginning teachers were likely to struggle as Flushman et al. (2021) found that those without the assistance from early mentoring, and other supports such as a reduced teaching load and collaborative planning time, were twice as likely to leave the profession.

Furthermore, Wilhelm (2020) found that one of the most important reasons to establish mentoring programs is to provide formal and informal feedback to new teachers. This is especially critical to new teachers as Benevene et al. (2019) linked the relationship that positive and supportive feedback can play to combat teacher burnout and stress. Mentors serve a variety of roles including observing, coaching, and providing new teachers feedback, answering daily questions that may arise from more urgent needs, and supporting emotionally through advice or active listening (Wexler, 2020). Mentors can also play a significant role in building the self-esteem of new teachers, a factor that can either positively or negatively influence teacher burnout

or retention (Méndez, 2020). Furthermore, Moosa and Rembach (2020) wisely caution about implementing a mentor system carefully, reminding school leaders that mentors themselves need continued support and professional development to do their job well. Despite the additional challenge for school leaders to build and train a mentor support team, research has shown that it can provide many positive benefits in meeting the lower-level needs of beginning teachers.

Professional Development

School leaders should also be attentive to the ongoing professional support and growth of their beginning teachers. Fisher and Crawford (2020) note that one characteristic of a successful school is the quality of professional development offered to the teachers. However, not all professional development should be considered equal. Murray (2022) suggests that schools should abandon the traditional style of whole-group professional development workshops, speakers, or other one-and-done type sessions on topics that vary in relevance. By pointing to research showing the ineffectiveness of this type of professional development, Murray (2022) instead recommends schools pursue a culture of collaboration, school improvement goals, content knowledge, and active teacher learning. While professional development can take many different forms, Wilcoxen et al. (2021), suggest that it should allow new teachers to receive timely, specific, explicit feedback delivered both in written and oral form. These opportunities to collaborate and gain further knowledge into content and classroom practices are necessary for new teachers, who as noted by Keller-Schneider et al. (2020) require appropriate support to manage the adjustment to teaching. An additional recommendation from Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), points to successful case studies within the United States, advocating that schools create residency programs for beginning teachers who would be under the supervision of a licensed teacher while earning a credential or master's degree and in return,

committing to the school for a set number of years. Beginning year teachers may also appreciate existing curriculum resources and guides as they could be overwhelmed if the task of curriculum development was entirely up to them, although Bauml (2015) notes that teachers will require ongoing support to avoid the anxieties associated with curriculum pacing and assessment. The importance of effective professional development can be summarized by Pivovarova and Powers (2022), who noted that teachers, even those in challenging high needs in settings, are more likely to remain teaching if they receive proper and ongoing professional development and programs. Such effective programs, according to Kwok and Cain (2021), could be customized and scaffolded to prevent early career teachers from either becoming too overwhelmed or receiving ineffective or unnecessary training.

Peer Relationships

In addition to effective mentors and ongoing professional development, schools should also seek to establish healthy and effective teacher learning communities which will create a beneficial and supportive culture for first year teachers. Both Wilhelm et al. (2020) and Wexler (2020) discovered that new teachers factor in a lack of a collegial work environment with their peers and colleagues as a reason to leave the classroom. This thought is consistent with Nguyen (2021) who found teachers with high levels collaboration and cooperation with their fellow teachers were less likely to turnover. For first-year teachers, it is critical that their school environments provide safety for their emotional and mental health (McLean et al., 2020). To establish this concept, Flushman et al. (2021) recommends the creation of new teacher learning communities to provide a space for first-year teachers "to develop social and emotional competencies" (p. 91). These communities are essential for new teachers as Grillo and Kier, (2021) found that teachers are likelier to stay within a healthy school culture and climate as

defined by high levels of trust and community. Wilhelm's (2020) work agrees with these types of supports, including prioritizing collaboration among beginning teachers, which plays a significant role in building the professional networks they will rely on. These collegial opportunities help meet the social needs of teachers (Sutcher et al. 2019). Thomas et al. (2019) argued that creating these social needs built an environment for teachers to feel a connectedness to the school community that encouraged retention and the development of knowledge and skills for the classroom. A healthy professional learning community is an avenue for teacher growth and professional development leading to more "sustained and continuous teacher learning resulting in both improved instruction and student achievement" (Flushman et al., 2021, p. 83). Ensign et.al (2018), though focusing on physical education teachers, emphasized the importance of a smooth new teacher assimilation into the school community. Research continues to show that providing new teachers with social and professional learning supports results in higher teacher job satisfaction increasing the likelihood of retention (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022). This finding echoed a Miller and Youngs (2021) study which found collegial relationships were a strong predictor of teacher retention, further emphasizing the need for school leaders to build a climate of collegiality and respect.

Administrative Support

While many supports can determine the success and retention of first year teachers, administrative leadership can often play the greatest role in meeting the needs of beginning educators. Carpenter et al., 2022). Torres (2016) found that teacher perceptions of leadership play a significant factor in how teachers view their school climates and serve as a reliable predictor of turnover or retention thus administrators should not dismiss their own personal contribution and responsibility in supporting first-year teachers. Studies conducted by Ensign et

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al. (2018) and Kim (2019) found that supportive administrators and principals were just as important as colleagues to first-year teachers, so long as they empathized with new teacher experiences and worked to bring solutions to challenges. One reason for this situation as noted by Grillo and Kier (2021) is because administrators can be an effective source of fairness and guidance for teachers. As Ensign et.al (2018) found, beginning teachers noticed when they did not quickly meet or form a relationship with their boss. This initial lack of contact set an unhelpful precedent to the development of new teachers. Alternatively, school leaders can choose to use their influence wisely as Bickmore and Dowell (2019) found that effective principals paid attention to how teacher working conditions are set-up and managed at the local school level. Burkhauser's (2017) finding agrees with Dowell noting that effective principals ensure not only a safe and supportive environment for their teachers but also a focus on teacher accomplishments and successes. The most effective school leaders build a culture "characterized by mutual trust, respect, [and] openness" that ultimately "creates school environments conducive to learning" (Bickmore & Dowell, 2019, p. 389). Maslow's work on human needs provides an appropriate and helpful framework that school leaders can use for management in both theory and practice (Acevedo, 2018).

School leaders who focus on teacher support and stress management are implementing Maslow's concept of needs, (whether they realize it or not) by building a strong foundation for first-year teachers. Principals should thus prioritize an environment of emotional and physical health by seeking solutions to first-year teacher stress and burnout (Burkhauser, 2017). Most importantly, Bickmore and Dowell (2019) identify effective principal leadership as potentially the most influential reason why teachers stay or leave, especially from principals who proactively sought to improve their teacher's instruction and experience at the school. Studies

have shown that teachers, even in schools with challenging settings, perceive the effect of strong leadership on school culture (Nielsen & Taggart, 2021). As noted by Gawlik (2018) effective school leadership is rooted "in their daily activities and interactions with the teachers" meaning that principals do not need to look far, to find areas where they can provide immediate, helpful support (p. 560). This hypothetically should be an easier motivator for school leaders as Castro (2023) identifies teacher coaching as one of the primary reasons school principals entered the profession (Castro, 2023). By continuing to prioritize teacher growth and coaching, principals can spend more time investing in human capital and less time in the turnover cycle of constant recruiting, hiring, training, and coaching (Castro, 2023). By using their time to invest in teachers, Maslow's (1943) concepts of self-esteem and actualization are shown when school leaders demonstrate trust in their teachers and involvement in decision making (Kim, 2019). This will allow teachers to develop a positive approach toward their work as they develop and navigate challenging situations (Stump and Newbury, 2021). Further studies have found that providing teachers support and feedback by using motivating language while giving them access to decision-making that affects their classrooms, increases their self-efficacy (Sutcher et al., 2019; Ozeren et al., 2020). Effective administrators produce positive effects on teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2021). Whether or not they realize it, administrators who lead this way are incorporating Maslow's (1943) ideas into their practice building a climate where teachers are supported from their most basic to their highest level of needs.

Unique Challenges of First-year Teachers in Charter Schools

While the issue of teacher turnover affects new teachers across all settings, the additional challenges of teaching in a charter school significantly contribute to higher levels of turnover within these schools (Burkhauser, 2017). The growth of charter schools, fueled in part by the

demand for higher quality schools and expanded educational choice in low-income communities, has experienced rapidly increasing enrollment especially in the past decade (Gawlik, 2018). While still considered public schools due to receiving state, federal, and local tax dollars, charter schools, as noted by Barrett et al. (2022), must successfully attract students and meet performance goals set by their authorizers as a requirement to stay open, adding pressures that are different than traditional public schools. Furthermore, unlike public schools which are rooted in considerable historical and social context, charter schools lack the same depth of study in their own story of presenting educational choice and a market driven approach of educational innovation (Goodridge, 2020). Charter schools often lack equivalent funding to traditional public schools and a result, studies including Knight and Toenjes (2020) found that most charter schools offer lower teacher salaries, are staffed with teachers with less experience, and have higher rates of turnover. Additionally, Naslund and Ponomariov (2019) note that charter schoolteachers, unlike their public-school counterparts, typically experience longer work weeks, are not eligible for job protections such as tenure, and earn raises based on performance alone versus a more structured system of pay increases. These findings are consistent with Bickmore and Dowell (2019) who state that these types of working conditions and school culture, are the likeliest factor in the higher turnover among charter schoolteachers. To proactively prevent teacher turnover, Gulosino et al. (2019) and Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) suggests that charter schools, especially those newly established, implement more professional development, training, and opportunities for classroom support for their new teachers. Because some charter school working conditions may not be easily changed, turnover within charters may be inherently higher in this setting; thus, charter school leaders should provide intentional opportunities to support

and train their faculties to encourage better staff retention, school climate, and ultimately student achievement.

Charter School Teacher Turnover

Research has consistently shown that charter schoolteachers turn over at a higher rate than teachers in the traditional public schools. A study by Gulosino et al. (2019) noticed the turnover rate within charter schools was 18.5% versus 13.4% in traditional public schools. Pivovarova and Powers (2022) found that on average teacher attrition is 54% higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools. In one study, two different charter schools experienced a loss of 64% and 75% of their first-year teachers due to leaving of their own volition or due to performance (Bickmore & Dowell, 2019). While this case study may be an outlier in terms of such high turnover, it reflects what could be happening in certain charter schools across the country. The idea that beginning charter schoolteachers may be especially susceptible to turnover is furthered by Gulosino et al. (2019) who found that approximately 30% leave at the end of their first year for a different school, or the profession entirely. Naslund and Ponomariov (2019) and Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) note the negative effect turnover has on school culture and teacher quality worrying the result will be detrimental to student achievement. As charter schools are often established among populations of lower performing students, turnover is likely one factor preventing successful student outcomes (Burkhauser, 2017) and (Gulosino et al. 2019). In addition to concerns regarding student achievement, Roch and Sai (2017) suggest that this turnover only creates further problems for schools because it signals concerns within the educational environment. One reason charter schools especially have seen higher rates of teacher turnover than their public-school counterparts may be due to the lack of a supportive environment and training for teachers new in their career (Gulosino et al. 2019).

Charter School Settings

Founded in part to provide greater flexibility and innovation within public education, charter schools have embraced more localized control, freer from many constraints of the traditional public schools (Roch & Sai, 2017; Naslund & Ponomariov, 2019). This reality is especially true when it comes to the hiring, evaluating, and dismissing of teachers and other personnel (Knight & Toenjes, 2020). Such increased autonomy has allowed charter schools the freedom to set curriculum, school policies, and hire teachers more inclined toward the mission of the charter school, versus their previous preparation or qualifications (Roch & Sai, 2017). Yet these freedoms do not come without significant hurdles. Although not necessarily limited to first-year teachers, charter schools especially struggle in their opening years due to the task of establishing school culture and building relationships with the students and families they are working with inside and outside the classroom (Spees & Lauen, 2019). Furthermore, especially in the start-up and early years, charters are not funded equitably compared to traditional public schools (Geheb & Owens, 2019). A newly released study by the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform (2023) supports the concept that charter schools produce better results on less funding. In this study, Johnson et.al (2023) found that 8th grade students scored an average of 2.4 points higher in reading and 1.3 points better in math on National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) examinations despite 30% less funding than traditional public-school districts. The study also found that charter schools could do 40% better if they had access to equal funding. While these studies indicate charter schools can be successful despite the funding gap, they present an additional challenge that successful charter schools must overcome.

Both Roch and Sai (2017) and Gulosino et al. (2019) also found that the tendency of charter schools to serve urban neighborhoods with higher populations of low-income families is

consistent with the need to provide greater school choice options to families where traditional

public schools may be underperforming. Studies have shown that charter schools generally

outperform traditional public schools in these areas (Harris and Chen, 2022). Walters (2018)

similarly found that poor and low achieving students demonstrate the greatest academic gains.

Research has shown that teachers, regardless of being in public or charter schools, are prone to

express lower levels of job satisfaction when schools locate within cities versus suburban areas

(Roch and Sai, 2017). This is likely because urban schools face greater inhibitions to success

stemming from poverty and historically marginalized groups (Kolluri, 2022). For these reasons,

working in a charter school may be daunting to early career teachers. Despite these challenges,

school leaders must look for opportunities to support teacher stability especially in more

demanding demographics and settings, which may require greater assistance to support success

in the classroom (Wronowski et al., 2023).

Charter School Teacher Preparation

While teacher licensing and preparation programs can be helpful to transition teachers

into the profession, some charter schools are exempt from traditional state licensing and

preparation program requirements. While studies on teacher licensing have been lacking or

relatively inconclusive in their finding, the goal of such programs has remained to provide

beginning teachers with an existing body of knowledge and skills, which teachers who are

bypassing this route will not be able to access (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Reducing the

barriers to teaching may provide charter schools greater flexibility in hiring practices, it could

also result in some teachers not being properly equipped for the classroom (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2023; Naslund & Ponomariov, 2019). At least twenty-five states do not

require traditional teacher certification and some studies have found that teachers who do not

first complete a preparation program are more likely to turnover (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022).

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that teachers who entered the profession

through alternative pathways, like many teachers in charter schools, were more than likely to

leave the school and profession. Their research is supported by Podolsky et. al (2019) and

Mccluskey (2022) who found that turnover among non-certified or alternatively certified

teachers to be 150% higher than teachers who were traditionally certified. Additionally states

with looser certification requirements are more likely to hire directly from competitive

undergraduate institutions even though studies have shown that teachers who do not possess

temporary, or even alternate certification are likelier to turnover (Gulosino, 2019). While

Nguyen and Redding (2018) concluded that alternate certification can indeed bring in teachers

with stronger academic abilities, turnover among this subsection of teachers has always been an

issue. Studies have also found that teachers in charter schools tend to be younger and have less

experience than teachers in the traditional public schools (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022, Torres,

2016, Cannata & Penaloza, 2012). Roch and Sai (2017) noted that 34% of teachers in charter

schools are below the age of 30 with 37% of them having taught less than three years. This

number compares to 20% of public teachers who are under the age of 30 with 16% of them

having less than three years of experience. Hiring younger and less experienced teachers may be

a result of reduced certification requirements, but it is also more cost effective for schools on a

tight budget (Roch and Sai, 2017). Unfortunately, while there may be benefits to having greater

flexibility when it comes to hiring, researchers have continually shown that this model will result

in greater teacher turnover and disruption to student learning (Chambers Mack et al., 2019).

Principals who hire more teachers who did not complete a preparation program should be

prepared to provide further support to make up for their lack of training in pedagogy and

instructional practices (Wilhelm et al., 2020). This situation is especially true when considering

many charter schools are located in high needs areas with a larger population of minority

students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Stressful Standardized Testing and Performance

Education reform measures connected to accountability and standardized testing play a

significantly more stressful role in charter school culture. Charter schools often have stricter

requirements for student achievement and growth based on standardized testing as required by its

authorizers, for both opening and rechartering (Reed & Rose, 2018). This increased focus on

testing may add additional stress and pressure on charter schoolteachers, who are generally less

experienced than their public-school counterparts (Tong et al., 2023). Naslund and Ponomariov

(2019) describe the tendency of many charter schools to focus almost exclusively on teacher and

student performance, which can lead to more stressful teacher working conditions. Bickmore and

Dowell (2019) also found that the emphasis on standardized test scores force both administrators

and teachers to hit performance benchmarks emphasizing that teachers who underperformed

could be contractually non-renewed for their ineffectiveness or their students' poor test scores.

Additionally, Torres (2016) observed that this intense workload associated with these

high-pressure working conditions may play a significant factor in the retention of teachers,

especially in charter schools The tendency of many charter schools to hire younger, energetic,

and missionally aligned teachers creates an opportunity for some of the teachers to work upwards

of 60 to 80 hours a week if left unchecked, likely resulting in burnout (Torres, 2016). Similarly,

Roch and Sai (2017) found that charter schoolteachers make less in salary and benefits and carry

more administrative responsibilities – and while they may be mission-committed to working with

an underprivileged demographic – these factors are more likely to lead to burnout and turnover.

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Burkhauser (2017) agreed that these types of working conditions may be among the most influential reasons related to turnover. Naslund and Ponomariov (2019) described these stressors as a tendency within charter schools to be guided by a business model based on competition and other "market-based strategies" for improving and incentivizing performance, especially in the ability to remove underperforming teachers, contrary to the public-school practice of utilizing tenure and qualification to stabilize retention (p.12). Furthermore, this same study found high charter school turnover produced a negative effect on student achievement suggesting that this market-driven labor hypothesis could be self-defeating toward actual academic outcomes.

Effect on School Culture

Ultimately, these factors lead to higher teacher turnover and unhealthy school culture, which contributes to reasons a low-performing charter is likely to close (Baude et al., 2020). As Kraft et al. (2016) found in their study, student achievement and school culture are directly linked. Not surprisingly, Roch and Sai (2017) note that an unhealthy school cultures signals issues within the school environment. As noted by Gulosino et al. (2019), these issues can impact the overall climate, safety, and student behavior of the school. Negative relationships among administrators, teachers, and students often characterize poor school culture and is a reason that teachers leave their schools (Bickmore & Dowell, 2019; Burkhauser, 2017). These factors, as discussed by Redding and Henry (2019), negatively impact working conditions, and adversely affect first year teachers. When schools struggle to build an effective and supportive culture, teachers will begin to feel isolated (Wexler, 2020). These types of feelings will ultimately drive charter schools away from the teaching profession (Roch and Sai, 2017).

Classical Charter Schools

White and Huang (2022) note the diversity in different types of charter schools which provide families with more choices. One growing subset of the charter school movement is classical charter schools. A classical charter school embraces an approach to education defined by the Greek concept of *paideia*, the education required for citizenship "in its physical, moral, and intellectual aspects" and "formation in good taste, manners, and rhetoric, in practical and theoretical pursuits, as well as morally and culturally" (Zovko & Dillon, 2018, p. 554). American philosopher Mortimer Adler further expounds upon classical education describing it as the preparation for life-long learning, learning from conventional and didactic methods through practice and guidance, and the implementation of a Great Books curriculum using Socratic questioning and active participation (Byrnes, 1983). Schools whose missions are founded on these ideas can be considered "classical schools" (Byrnes, 1983). While research remains limited on the academic achievement of classical charter schools, Richardi (2021) found that schools utilizing a Paideia Program, based off the work of philosopher and educator Mortimer Adler, experienced promising academic results for students from diverse demographic backgrounds. A new study from 2023 showed that the classical charter school model outperformed other charter school models (such as STEM, arts, Montessori, and language immersion) in both reading and math scores (Huang & White, 2023). These results are promising for future demand and growth of more classical charter schools.

The concept of classical education in charter schools is based on the teaching of the foundation subjects of reading, math, and writing while incorporating a liberal arts approach of the sciences, history, and classics, especially the teaching of Latin (Caros, n.d.). This approach differs from many modern approaches to education which emphasize job training and critical

thinking above the action of learning and knowledge for its own sake (Caros, n.d.). White and

Huang (2022) list other characteristics of classical schools including the Core Knowledge

Curriculum Sequence pioneered by Dr. E.D. Hirsch, Socratic seminar and discussion, the

curricular implementation of the trivium and quadrivium, and Aristotelian-influenced teachings

on virtue. Similarly, McShane and Hatfield (2015) agree that the Socratic method and the

organization of learning and grades within an elementary grammar school, a dialectic middle

school, and a rhetoric high school appropriately distinguish a classical school. Additionally,

Durkin (2014) notes the critical role that Latin instruction plays in a classical charter school.

Classical schools also tend to emphasize the role of citizenship as noted by Howe (2011) who

cited the American founding fathers as strong proponents of classical learning to avoid the

mistakes made by the Greeks and Romans while still possessing an understanding of their ideals

of citizenship and virtue. While bemoaning the lack of classical charter schools Howe (2011)

praised the work of Ridgeview Classical School, a charter school in Colorado which was one of

the first charters to teach a strong classical curriculum "against modern trends in education" (p.

36). As the classical charter school movement remains a relatively new phenomena in American

education, it is unclear whether data regarding teacher support and retention would be

comparable to other non-classical charter schools.

Summary

First-year teachers in any educational setting face many challenging obstacles to

overcome in their transition and adjustment into the classroom (Wilhelm et.). al, 2020). Utilizing

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation as a solution to this problem, the means of support

for first-year charter schoolteachers were addressed. First-year teacher turnover is higher in

charter schools than traditional public schools indicating a problem that school leaders should

address (Naslund & Ponomariov, 2019). Charter schools often struggle to retain teachers which

can result in negative effects on the culture of the school and student achievement (Gulosino, et

al., 2019). Schools that prioritize these needs demonstrate greater teacher efficacy and retention

for all their teachers, including those in the first year. (Roch & Sai, 2017). The principal's role is

to manage the steps necessary to implement effective teacher support. As classical charter

schools are still a relatively new educational phenomena, this study will closely examine the

experience of its first-year teachers. By looking specifically at teachers in these schools through

the lens of Maslow's (1943) theory, ideas for strengthening teacher support will hopefully guide

school leaders, the most capable vessels of providing such appropriate support, in building a

healthy school culture.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study is to understand the challenging experience of first-year teachers at existing classical charter schools in the United States of America. Participants who are no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching will reflect on their most positive and challenging experiences to determine what caused them to remain in the teaching profession. The data will then be used to explore why these teachers remained in the profession and if they developed successful strategies to manage the stress and responsibilities that accompany teaching. Through understanding these stories and experiences of their beginning teachers, school leaders are provided with insight on how to effectively lead, support, and retain their educators in a society where costly teacher turnover continues to have a negative impact on school culture and student success (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). In this chapter, I will describe the study's intended setting, participants, procedures and disclose key assumptions that may have affected my own understanding of this research design. Finally, I review data collection approaches and analyses before affirming steps being taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

Research Design

The focus of this research design centered on the rationale of classical charter schoolteachers remaining in the profession beyond their first year. School leaders can use this information to teach their first-year teacher's successful strategies to encourage retention and growth. Teachers who are no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching in the United States of America (not those in their first year at their specific school), were asked to participate by completing an interview, journal questions, and reflecting on a key artifact.

Participants were also full-time classroom teachers; substitute teachers or those working as paraprofessionals or teachers' assistants did not qualify. Teachers in their first year already face a challenging workload and may not have the ability to reflect properly on their experiences, thus the researcher selected teachers who already completed their first year and remained at the same school. A qualitative research design was the most appropriate to learn directly from these teacher experiences and what reasons led to their decision to remain in the profession. This view was consistent with Denzin and Lincoln (2011) who believed that the qualitative approach allowed researchers the ability to study, understand, and interpret meaning and phenomena in their natural settings, which is critical to understanding the experience of beginning teachers.

This research design utilized a case study to best understand an "in depth description and analysis" of the phenomena of first-year teacher experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67). Historically, case studies originated in the early 20th century from the modern social sciences and are used among a variety of disciplines (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A multiple-site bounded case was used to achieve the required number of participants. Both settings shared many of the same key attributes, such as school mission and curriculum, to replicate the study as similarly as possible. Because of the limitations of those who can participate, specifically, teachers no more than three years removed from their first-year teaching, the case study was bound by this requirement and the above commonalities shared by the schools. This bounded system gathered data from ten interviews, journal reflections, and physical documents from teachers who were willing to share their reflections from their first year of teaching. For all these reasons, a bounded case study was the appropriate research design as it allowed for a deeper understanding and analysis of first-year teacher experiences, specifically by focusing on answers to "how and "why" questions (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, using an instrumental case, I gathered sources from a

variety of data points to understand the problem of first-year teacher stress. Stake (1995)

provided guidance on identifying "a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general

understanding, and feel that we may get into the question by studying a particular case" as best

practices for using an instrumental case study (p. 3).

The question of why teachers chose to remain teaching and how school leaders were able

to support and retain them was the emphasis of this case study. Baxter and Jack (2008) noted the

importance of using various lenses to best understand the context. Teachers were recruited from

different demographic factors including grade levels and subjects while multiple sources of data

and information including interviews, journals, and other relevant artifacts, were examined to

ensure that the appropriate research and data of these experiences were collected and understood

properly. Analysis of the data emphasized the importance of these real-life experiences within

contemporary settings (Yin, 2018). Through this process, the data collected will help further and

broaden research on teacher retention for current and future school leaders.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Sub-Question One

Which types of professional development and administrative support are effective for

first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Sub-Question Two

Which types of administrative support are effective for first-year teachers in classical

charter schools?

Sub-Question Three

How can mentoring and peer relationships improve the experience of first year teachers in classical charter schools?

Setting and Participants

Site

The site for this study was two classical charter schools in the United States. While the charter school movement began in the late 1980s, the classical charter school movement is a relatively new phenomenon emerging more prominently in the 2000s (Goodridge, 2019). The classical school movement is defined by an emphasis on traditional liberal arts education for students that includes the study of Latin and the explicit teaching of virtue. A classical charter school would especially fit the parameters for this research as there is an existing gap in the literature within the first-year experiences of teachers in *classical* charter schools, due to their relatively new emergence. The schools varied in student and faculty size ranging from 700-950 students and 75-90 faculty and staff members. The setting for one school was urban while the other was slightly more suburban with approximately 30% of the student body in both schools characterized as "high need" due to socioeconomic status, English language learning level, or having a documented disability which impacts learning. The organizational structure of these schools is generally composed of a governing board who provides vision and final oversight and compliance and a headmaster who governs the daily affairs. Both schools were operated by the same charter management organization (CMO).

Participants

Convenience and purposeful sampling will be utilized to identify participants in this study. Those who volunteered to contribute were required to have been classroom teachers who

completed at least one school year in the United States of America's education system within any grade level or subject from kindergarten through grade twelve. Participants must be classroom teachers not teacher assistants or paraprofessionals who are no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching. A diversity of teachers participated to help identify any themes specific to grade levels or discipline including special education teachers, English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) teachers, and other specialized teachers. A total of 10 interviews were completed. Case study research supports this number for appropriate saturation (Mason, 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Researcher Positionality

Interpretive Framework

As a qualitative researcher, I used the theoretical lens of social constructivism in addition to Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation. As defined by Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivism believes that individuals "develop subjective meanings of their experiences" that are "formed through interaction with others" (p. 24). To form this construct, researchers must ask open-ended questions that allow the process of participation to be revealed organically based off the context of what interaction or setting is being studied. Having spent the past eight years in school administration, I have played an active role in the recruiting, training, and retaining of highly effective teachers who often came directly from undergraduate programs without formal student teaching experience. I am very interested in the stories of these teachers from their first year, especially what support structures were effective for them and if they made a difference in their decision to remain in the teaching profession. Social constructivism provided the appropriate theoretical framework toward understanding each teacher's context and situation, building a theory of how schools can support younger teachers just entering the profession.

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Additionally, my research of Abraham Maslow and his theory of human needs (1943) has further transformed my thinking on how best to support teachers, especially in their first year. Maslow provided a framework to holistically meet human needs by addressing all facets of the human person. Research has shown that these principles can be applied to various disciplines, and I believe that teaching, given its foundational work within human interaction, provides an ideal context for applying Maslow's ideas.

As a former school administrator, I am reminded of when the apostle Paul took on the active role of mentoring Timothy. Paul's selection and decision to bring Timothy into the ministry of preaching the gospel was very intentional as "he wanted Timothy to accompany him" in delivering the teachings on behalf of the apostles and elders back in Jerusalem (Acts 16:3, Bible Gateway Online). Paul's decision to mentor Timothy, ultimately led to Timothy becoming another important leader of the church who helped advance the work of the gospel. It is my hope that I will also play a critical role in the raising up and training of effective teachers who can grow into influential educators who have a godly and positive impact within schools, students, and families. Paul recognized Timothy's ability to learn from his own experiences, by walking in his shoes, would only benefit his and Timothy's ability to teach and lead. Similar to Paul, taking the time to build and nurture mentoring relationships with others, especially those younger and less experienced, will hopefully produce great fruit down the road in the lives of many students.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions are centered on a post-positivist and social constructivist view of the world. Additionally, my own background and personal experience has led me to pursue this research design to gain greater knowledge and understanding into a topic I can personally relate to, and I seek to better understand as a school leader. Through these lenses, I

view the world and approach research seeking to understand how social interactions should be fundamentally based on the truths created as part of this world.

Ontological Assumption

As an educational researcher my ontological assumption is grounded in post-positivism. My belief as a Christian is that all truth comes from the one reality of the world God created. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the reason the researcher may be unable to access it could be due "to a lack of absolutes" (p. 35). Ultimately, I believe that Bible teaches that our fallen human nature could be the more accurate reason for different understandings of reality. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul describes this phenomenon as seeing "in a mirror dimly" (Bible Gateway Online, 2016). Even looking through a dim mirror can show things about the world and truths that can be known. Christians in the educational research field can approach the attainment of knowledge through a process of learning more about God's world.

Epistemological Assumption

When it comes to my epistemological assumption, I believe the social constructivism perspective best explains how individuals may have different understandings of the world God created. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), "subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views" (p. 21). While I believe the foundations of the post-positive epistemological beliefs are important, especially the use of science, reason, and data, ultimately how the world is experienced by the researcher and the researched will greatly influence what is known and what is perceived to be reality. Through these different perspectives, even if fallen, God uses our lives for his good. In Jeremiah 18:6, God promises us that "like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand" (Bible Gateway Online, 2016). God has used our experiences to shape us, thus different perspectives and understandings about reality are naturally occurring according to

God's plan. My role as a researcher is not to shape this study through my own biases but rather

highlight the experiences of others so that they may teach us more about the created world.

Axiological Assumption

From an axiological assumption, I gravitated toward a post-positive understanding that

the biases or other fundamental beliefs of a researcher should be carefully controlled to ensure

that the perceptions of those being researched will be communicated effectively and accurately.

Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the "positioning" of the researcher is important to how the

study will be presented to the reader (p. 21). Following the example of the apostle Paul,

"speaking the truth in love" points people in the direction of the Gospel (Ephesians 4:15, Bible

Gateway Online, 2016). As an educator, teacher, and school administrator, I recognized that

these experiences have shaped my axiological assumption; however, I chose to enter this

research design with openness to learning more about the truth rather than advancing an agenda.

I hope to use my experience and insight not to cloud the results of the data but rather highlight its

nuances and empathize with the participants while maintaining fidelity to this study.

Researcher's Role

Because of my experience as a school administrator, this research design is significant to

my own work and the findings could have significant implications on my own professional

practice. Firstly, as a former teacher I completed a series of personal reflections following my

first year of teaching that laid out why I chose to remain a teacher. These recollections provided

some of the inspiration for this study and I am seeking similar thoughtfulness from teachers in

their first year regardless of whether they somehow recorded their reflections. Furthermore, my

teaching career began in a charter school, and I did not complete an undergraduate program prior

to teaching which is a potential shared experience with some of the participants in my study. Due

to my own experiences and reflection upon my first year, I am eager to hear the stories of those with similar experiences to understand why they have persevered in their teaching careers. Secondly as a former school administrator and current employee of a school district staff these reflections are important to my own understanding of how school leaders can be supportive of their first-year teachers by supporting retention for the long-term. As I am not overseeing any of the teachers who are participating, I hoped they felt that they could be completely candid and open about their experiences. My interest in the charter school movement stems from my career which has been exclusively in charter schools. My interest in classical schools stems from my own educational and vocational background. I attended a traditional liberal arts college for my undergraduate dergree and have been convinced of the merits of a classical education based on my ensuing professional and personal experience.

Procedures

To effectively conduct the study, respectful and appropriate permissions were sought, and a recruitment plan was conducted. The steps below were taken to ensure the integrity of the research study's procedures are preserved. Throughout the process, I hoped to act in a helpful, thoughtful, and supportive way.

Permissions

Site permission was obtained from the highest-level approval at a charter classical school within the United States, see Appendix C and Appendix D. Both sites were affiliated with an institute of higher education that provides curricular and pedagogical support for these schools. I received permission from two schools to conduct research and obtained approval from an additional school as a backup option. Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted, see Appendix A.

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After obtaining permission from the IRB, I then recruited participants. By working with the headmaster of the school, I worked to be open and transparent with the teachers on the purpose of the study. To ensure there are enough permissions, I selected both an additional and a back-up school (three schools in total). All permission letters were documented and filed appropriately, see Appendix D for the Participation Consent Form.

Recruitment Plan

Once I receive IRB approval and begin my research, I worked with the headmaster to provide information to the faculty on the research process utilizing both convenience and purposeful sampling. While the potential schools I explored employ approximately 75 teachers, the research design calls for the teachers to be no more than three years removed from their first year. For this reason, the number of eligible participants was less than the total number of faculty members at both schools thus I sought at least 10 interviews from teachers. So long as they met the requirement of not being further than three years removed from their first year and are willing and able to contribute, they were eligible to participate. The selected teachers varied in terms of subject and background but must still be relatively new to the teaching profession and could still be considered beginning teachers. All participants were provided with informed consent of the study and could contact me with any questions before participating. Participation was completely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.

Data Collection Plan

To best understand the experience of first-year charter schoolteachers and their decision to stay or leave the profession within this qualitative case study, data are proposed to be collected through the following three methods: physical documents and artifacts, interviews, and journal prompts. Teachers were requested to bring physical documents to the interview including

observation and evaluation feedback, lesson plans, professional development plans, and any other helpful relevant documentation that may describe or add more information about their first year of teaching. A semi-structured interview occurred, most of which were in-person. Time was allotted in the interview for a question or two on the provided artifact. Finally, participants were asked to write journal responses to a few selected questions both before and after the interview. Questions completed before the interview helped prepare the teacher for reflection on their first year. Journaling at the end allowed additional time after the interview for reflection and sharing. Journaling also provided an opportunity to refine or clarify any additional thoughts and feedback that were originally provided during the interview.

Physical Documents and Artifacts

Physical documents and artifacts were the first method of data collection. Following Yin's (2018) suggestion, regardless of submission, the documentation was used to support and corroborate the findings of the research design. While an abundance of paperwork and documentation normally accompanies the teaching profession, it is important to set clear parameters on what teachers may select as helpful evidence. Teachers were asked to voluntarily share artifacts from their first year of teaching which included observation summaries, evaluations, lesson plans, training plans, and other professional development opportunities. It could also be a book or other resource that they utilized for support and encouragement. These artifacts should show a particular meaningful experience from their first year. In a school setting, it is important to be respectful of the confidentiality of the many documents that teachers have access to, so this fact was emphasized to teachers when asking them to share. However, documents from the first year provided more insight into the coaching and support they may have received during their first-year teaching. A document as simple as a sample lesson plan can

provide substantial information on how the teacher is preparing for class, the status of the existing curriculum, and what supports and coaching they might be receiving from supervisors. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), the purpose of these types of documents is to support what is found in the interview, thus ideally, teachers can submit them ahead of time to discuss them further or alternatively if necessary, during the interview. Privacy will be protected by ensuring all materials are labeled with a pseudonym. Access to pseudonyms will remain secure via my password-protected laptop.

Physical Documents and Artifacts Data Analysis Plan

Physical documents and artifacts were analyzed individually as each participating teacher may submit a unique item; thus, no transcription was needed. Examples of items include plans and procedures related to training, professional development, or lesson and content materials. Additionally, copies of their evaluations, whether from classroom observations or summative middle or end-of -year evaluations, were helpful to creating a narrative demonstrating patterns of strength and growth. As such a matrix was used to group the documents and artifacts into categories of training plan, lesson plan, and so forth to compare these different elements of the participants' first year of teaching. Then by taking an inductive strategy of working from the "ground up," the data was then coded into different themes that evaluated what role these artifacts played in the first-year teacher experience (Yin, 2018). Initial coding of the data provided the "starting point" needed for me to take the study in the right direction (Saldaña, 2021, p. 149). Lastly, utilizing a time-series analysis of these documents, a connection to the role they played during the school year and ultimately the decision to remain in the teaching profession was used as evidence to triangulate with the other data collected.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted using open-ended questions in a semi-structured setting to allow for rapport to be established. Specific questions were designed to allow the interviewee to reflect openly and honestly on their experience teaching during their first year. While interviewing may fundamentally be a conversation between two people, Creswell and Poth (2018) acknowledge that it can take great skill to ask open-ended questions in a manner that allows the interviewee to answer and share honestly and transparently. In collecting data for my proposed research design, I was upfront with the participating teacher interviewees by sending a brief personal biography highlighting my experience in education, the goal of my research design, and the list of questions during the interview ahead of time before the interview. The goal is for the interview to resemble more of a "guided conversations" rather than "structured questions" to encourage accurate, candid, and insight responses (Yin, 2018, p. 118). These interviews were audio recorded on two devices. While the goal is for these conversations to be conducted in person, Zoom was used if in-person was not feasible, due to reasons such as participant illness. Interviews were expected to last approximately 45 minutes each.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please provide a "living resume" of sorts describing your educational background, experiences working with children, and how you have arrived in your current role as a teacher? CRQ

2. What components of the school attracted you to apply and eventually accept the position? CRQ

3. What aspects of teaching were you confident in? CRQ; Determine how teachers felt about these important responsibilities at the beginning of their teaching careers (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

4. What were some of your more significant anxieties or areas of concern heading into the job? CRQ; McLean et al. (2020) note the connection between anxiety and teaching.

5. Did you complete a teacher preparation program? CRQ; Wilhelm (20202) acknowledges teacher preparation is not completely sufficient to prepare teachers for their first year while noting that teachers who enter through alternative certification turn over at a higher rate. This question seeks to provide some additional data on teacher background and potential success.

6. Did you feel prepared for your first year of teaching? CRQ; Pivovarova and Powers, (2022) note that teachers who did not complete a preparation program, like many charter teachers, are likelier to turnover thus this question will follow-up the previous question by asking teachers to gauge their level of preparedness.

7. What successes did you experience during your first year of teaching? CRQ; Burkhauser (2017) stresses the importance of recognizing teacher success. This question seeks to understand what successes may have been personally or professionally recognized.

8. What were some areas of growth you recognized over your first year of teaching? SQ1; Fisher and Crawford (2020) emphasize that professional development can be an effective too for teacher growth thus this question explores teacher perceptions of this growth.

9. How would you describe your first year of teaching from the following descriptions – up and down intervals, an upward or downward curve, or a consistent flat line? SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

10. What support did your school attempt to provide you during your first year? SQ1, SQ2, SQ3; Murray (2022) recommends practical professional development for first-year teachers so this question will see if school leaders were able to provide adequate training for their teachers.

11. Which types of support were helpful? SQ1, SQ2, SQ3; This question examines teacher perception of support and professional development (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020),

12. Which types of support were not as helpful? SQ1, SQ2, SQ3; This question examines teacher perception of support and professional development (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020),

13. How did you establish work-life balance? CRQ; Teachers with strong social-emotional connections suggests they are more likely to achieve higher needs of esteem and self-efficacy, but if balance was not accessible then stress likely dominated their experience (Flushman et al., 2021).

14. Who did you turn to when you had questions or needed encouragement? SQ2; Wexler (2020) notes the importance of mentoring teachers. This question would ask teachers if they had access to a formal or informal mentor teacher.

15. How effective was your school leader at being available for you? SQ2; Teacher perceptions of administrative leadership will be explored in this question. Bickmore and Dowell (2019) found that school leaders can provide effective support for first-year teachers.

16. What made you decide to stay in your position? CRQ; Naslund and Ponomariov (2019) have researched the role working conditions play in teacher turnover or retention. The teacher's response will compare to the findings of their study.

17. Let's discuss the artifact you brought. Why did you select it and how does it relate to

your first year of teaching? (It may make more sense to include this question elsewhere in

the interview depending on the artifact itself). CRQ

These questions sought to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their first year of

teaching and share openly their positive and negative experiences. The first question allowed

rapport to develop as I attempted to understand their story. The next four questions helped

establish context for the individual teacher and the school at large, as far as what might have

been appealing and attractive to potential teachers during their recruiting and interview process.

My hope was to generate reflections that would drive to answer the *why* they wanted to become

and stay teaching questions. Additionally, teachers were asked to reflect on some of their

anxieties and concerns headed into their first year of teaching. The next four questions focused

on professional development and support over their first year. The next three questions centered

more specifically on teacher perceptions of support whether from school leaders, mentors, or

other sources and sought to answer the *how* question related to their management of the

challenges. While questions thirteen and sixteen connect back to the central research question,

questions fourteen and fifteen allowed the participants to speak specifically about *who* filled a

specific need for support for their first year. The final question relates to the artifact and may be

worked in earlier depending on the flow of the conversation.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The first step in analyzing individual interviews was the process of transcribing each

interview carefully. Due to the tremendous amount of information provided from the interviews,

initially sorting each interview content chronologically while also noting the frequency of

different codes is consistent with Yin's (2018) suggestions to search and play with the data.

Carefully transcribing and then reading and reviewing the interviewee accounts led to my annotating and labeling of key words and phrases, especially *in vivo* codes. Initial and concept coding was utilized to develop codes and then categories were grouped and organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By approaching the data in this manner, "relevant or innovative concepts" that factored into teacher retention beyond the first year were pursued (Yin, 2018, p. 169). The technique of pattern-matching was used to address "how" and "why" responses to the interview questions. Finally, a thorough interpretation of these concepts was related back to the research study ultimately creating a point of view for the audience to understand (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Journal Prompts

The final method of data collection was the use of journal prompts. These prompts complemented the interview process by providing the interviewees with the opportunity to reflect further on their first year in a setting where they can more carefully consider and edit their thoughts and responses. Journals were also helpful because they can be easily reviewed or reread which was helpful to immersing and understanding personal reflections (Yin, 2018). To encourage completion of these prompts, the number was limited to five basic questions. Participants were asked to complete the first two questions prior to the interview. The following three questions were completed after the interview. The individual responses were asked to be at least 250 but not more than 1,000 words. The questions were designed to complement rather than repeat the topics covered in the interview. The teachers had the chance to submit their work electronically for further review and give feedback on their experience of contributing to this research study. I would expect these prompts to take roughly thirty to forty-give minutes to complete. Privacy was ensured as teachers completed forms electronically from the security of their own personal computer or laptop. Answers were collected and stored via Microsoft

Forms/Excel and can only be accessed on my password-protected computer for three years, after which, it will be deleted.

Journal Prompt Questions

1. What advice would you give to teachers in their first year at your school? At any school? CRQ

2. If you could go back in time, what would you tell the first-year teacher version of yourself? CRQ

3. What are some ways you can improve your contributions to your school community? CRQ

4. What has teaching taught you about yourself? CRQ

5. Please feel free to provide feedback to me on this process (optional but encouraged)!

This set of journal questions allowed teachers to consider how teaching has enabled their personal and professional growth. The first question promoted consideration of what pieces of advice they would give to fellow teachers should they be entering into an experience potentially very similar to their own. The second question personalized this reflection to themselves, and I anticipated the response being centered around opportunities for support and encouragement. Questions three and four prioritized their personal reflections on why they remained in the teaching profession. Finally, I provided the participants with an opportunity for feedback in question five to help me grow and learn as a researcher.

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

These five prompts were completed by the participants before and after the interview and were presented as open-ended, reflective questions with answers requested to be 250-1000 words. These responses triangulated the data and confirmed and strengthened the findings of

previous data collection efforts (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Saldaña's (2021) process for initial

and process coding was used to organize and analyze the data. By playing with this data,

information was sorted into themes established from the previous two data collections, especially

the interviews. If new or divergent themes emerge, the data wase reexamined for consistency

depending if participants had similar or different experiences upon reflection (Yin, 2018). There

are fewer journal prompt questions but the opportunity for personal reflection could mean a

wider range of themes and ideas. Careful analysis including utilizing pattern matching of the

relationships between answers, especially in terms of this case study's outcomes, was completed

during my review of the journal responses (Yin, 2018).

Data Synthesis

By ensuring that the data were properly triangulated, synthesis of the collection and

analysis efforts was based on a careful process of reviewing and emphasizing key themes,

patterns, and categories that emerged from the data. I considered the best option for data analysis

and avoiding bias, and ultimately included the use of NVIVO qualitative coding software to

confirm my manual coding. Keeping the research question at the forefront of the efforts helped

maintain the focus of sifting through and organizing all the data. Yin's (2018) suggestion is to

begin with the research questions, identify the evidence collected to answer the question, and

then draw conclusions based on the evidence. By analyzing the data from the ground up, it was

important to continuously go back to the research, take notes, and verify conclusions that were

found through coding and pattern matching. It is also critical to ensure that the context is

considered when interpreting the information focusing on what was learned in the process of data

collection (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) cautions that these various analytical

techniques required patience and practice. Ultimately Yin (2018) recommends keeping a general

strategy for analyzing the data in mind while not being afraid to "play with the data" in determining how it should be best analyzed (p. 200). By focusing on the facts, answers to the "how" and "why" of first-year teacher retention were the conclusions drawn from the rigorous collection of data.

Trustworthiness

The qualitative researcher possesses a significant responsibility to ensure that the data collected is handled in an ethical and trustworthy manner. The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) has helped to provide the necessary theoretical basis to allow the reader to ultimately determine the validity of the study. Shenton (2004) notes that Lincoln and Guba established four constructs' researchers can use to establish trustworthiness – credibility (or internal validity), transferability (or external validity/generalizability), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) (p. 64). While positivist critics challenge the trustworthiness of qualitative research based on its "validity and reliability," thanks to Lincoln and Guba's contributions, the qualitative researcher can take appropriate steps to help establish trustworthiness in their research (Shenton, 2004, p. 63).

Credibility

Establishing credibility is fundamentally important for the entire work to be taken seriously. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted credibility begins with the researcher's accuracy and fidelity to the data sources. To ensure credibility within my own internal research and practices, I utilized the following techniques: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation.

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Prolonged Engagement

It was important to be intimately familiar with the site where research was conducted. As such, I worked to understand the context of the schools visiting multiple times before the actual research was conducted. During these visits, I became familiar with the school's culture and practices. Being present at the school and interacting with some of the participant teachers outside the interview also helped build rapport and familiarity. I strove to be open and transparent about the work I was doing and allowed for questions to be asked and answered to avoid suspicion of my efforts (Shenton, 2004). By building trust at the schools to the extent I could, credibility was established at the site where the data was collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Persistent Observation

Like prolonged engagement, persistent observation ensured the data collected was comprehensive and reliable. This process ensured that the key themes and data points were reviewed and analyzed thoroughly by going back to the initial evidence collected. Feedback from my faculty committee was sought to provide multiple perspectives in viewing, understanding, and persisting with the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that persistent observation shows the depth of the data collection and analysis which will further deepen its credibility. Though it may be tedious at times, persistent observation required me to continually review the data, all the way back to original sources, to search for answers and connections, to ensure I was remaining faithful to the research design and questions.

Triangulation

By collecting data from physical documents and artifacts, individual interviews, and journals entries, the data was triangulated to ensure corroboration and consistency of the

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findings. Each source of data collection was carefully documented, recorded, and annotated, to allow for fact-checking if ever necessary. Yin (2018) describes the process of triangulation as developing "converging lines of inquiry" among the data sources to ensure the findings and conclusions are similar among the data sources (p. 128). As I have three sources of data collection, I was able to compare, contrast, and review as necessary to ensure proper triangulation.

Transferability

Establishing transferability means writing a case study that is understandable and accessible to everyone from the general public to future researchers. I strove to write clearly and transparently to allow for the study to potentially be applied in different contexts or times (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) call for providing the reader with "thick descriptions" to allow them to ultimately make their own judgment on the transferability of the research. Examples of thick descriptions include thorough information on the organization, setting, participants, data collection methods, and time periods that defined the research study (Shenton, 2004). With this goal in mind, I strove to write my case study in a way that could be easily replicated by future researchers validating the study externally by those with fresh eyes and perspectives.

Dependability

Like transferability, the findings of the research study should be able to be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By thoroughly describing the procedures of the research study, dependability was established. As a result, the reliability of my study can be more easily trusted. It is important for the researcher to be thorough in the description of these procedures which are ultimately reviewed by the dissertation committee and Qualitative Research Director at Liberty

University. Shenton (2004) suggests this will allow the reader to understand the extent to which research methods were followed in addition to the study. I attempted to think of my research as being a "prototype model" for future research design and implementation, from the collection of data all the way down to the most minute detail, and lastly the evaluation of the process (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

Confirmability

As with dependability, confirmability seeks to validate the study by ensuring that despite any interests or motivations the researcher may have, the research was done in a manner that is objective and not influenced by research bias if possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data must be shown to result from the work of appropriate collection methods and not simply the biases or ideas of the researcher. Triangulation also plays an important role in confirmability, and the researcher should be transparent and thorough regarding their own beliefs and understandings (Shenton, 2004). For anyone auditing the study, I would hope to ensure the study was based on the data, the clarity of the category structure, and the consideration of differing ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in a moral and ethical manner with the safety and consideration of the participants at the forefront. All documentation will be kept on file and stored centrally for at least three years, including permission letters, regardless of whether they are paper or electronic copies. Data will be stored on a secure password-protected laptop or a locked file cabinet. As this topic connects directly with my work as a school administrator, the data may be preserved beyond three years. Site permission was obtained from the highest level of oversight. In addition to receiving consent from the participants, their participation is

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voluntary, confidential, and can be withdrawn anytime. The potential for the data collected to be

compromised and thus the interviews and responses no longer being confidential is a risk;

however, the use of the pseudonyms, the security of devices, and the professional nature of the

researcher served as the primary mitigation factors to any risks from the participants.

Summary

This research design focused on the use of a case study to examine the experiences of

first-year teachers. By collecting physical documents and artifacts, utilizing interviews, and

receiving journal reflections, research data was used to determine why teachers remained in the

profession even after the challenges they endured from the first year. The data was driven

through reflections that produced themes from coding the documents, interview transcripts, and

journal responses in which school leaders can use to learn more about how to support teachers

who are in their first year. A careful analysis of the data was conducted that is faithful to the

research design and participants and establishes trustworthiness and credibility. Ultimately,

school leaders can use this data to set up their teachers for success, culminating in students'

ability to learn and grow while at school. The decision to support teachers begins with

understanding their experiences so that they can be their best selves to our youngest generation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The goal of this qualitative case study is to explore the experiences of first year teachers in classical charter schools. This chapter will provide demographic information for the 10 participants and 2 schools. By collecting data from teachers in their second, third, and fourth year, participants were asked to reflect and share about some of their primary challenges during their first year, significant successes, and decision making as to why they chose to remain in the profession. Results are presented in terms of themes and sub-themes that emerged through coding the research data collected from pre- and post-interview journal responses, individual interviews, and teacher artifacts. The study's central research question, "What are the experiences of first year teachers in classical charter schools?" and three sub-questions are aligned to the theoretical framework and will be presented accordingly.

Participants

The parameters for participants in this study were first-year experience of teachers who were no further than three years removed from their first-year teaching full time in a K-12 school located within the United States. Purposeful and convenience sampling was used to recruit K-12 teachers from two different classical charter schools. Both schools were started by the same founding group, are operated by the same CMO, and are affiliated with the same institution of higher learning that provided support for the schools in both curriculum and instruction. Thus, even though two different sites were used, the schools were bounded by similar defining characteristics. Ten teachers signed consent forms and participated in the research study to share their experiences of their first year of teaching. Teachers were recruited to participate by the researcher who found the effectiveness of a more personalized approach by speaking at a faculty

meeting, having in-person conversations, or sending individualized emails. The sample group

included only full-time teachers who had completed their first year of teaching in a K-12

educational setting in the United States no earlier than the 2020-2021 school year. Nine of the

interviews were conducted in-person, and one interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams due

to participant illness. Pseudonyms were given to all schools, teachers, and names of others (such

as colleagues) to ensure confidentiality of both the setting and participants.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught (including current)	School	Content Area	Grade Level
Lisa	3	Lincoln	All subjects	Elementary
Ally	2	Lincoln	All subjects	Elementary
Greg	2	Washington	Literature	Upper
Emma	2	Washington	History	Upper
Will	2	Lincoln	History	Middle
Jane	2	Lincoln	All subjects	Elementary
Heidi	3	Lincoln	Art	Elementary
Kendra	2	Lincoln	Special Education	Middle
Laura	3	Washington	ESOL	Multiple
Chelsea	4	Washington	Special Education	Multiple

Lisa

Lisa always wanted to be a teacher and enjoyed a relatively positive experience in her

undergraduate student teaching experience. Nonetheless, her transition to her first year in a first-

year school came with its challenges. Lisa specifically had to grow in her own confidence, in the

ability to ask for help and accept constructive feedback and learn a classical curriculum she was

not personally familiar with. While some may have shirked from these significant

responsibilities, Lisa did not. Although this growth was not always easy, Lisa ultimately

embraced her role as a teacher, especially with the help of a supportive team and network of

family and friends outside of school. Lisa learned to set good boundaries so that she could fully

invest herself while in the classroom. Her hard work paid off and she was proud of the academic

growth her students made. Although new to classical education, Lisa has grown into a strong

teacher and advocate not only for the curriculum, but the virtue driven approach it brings to the

lives of her students and families.

Ally

As an elementary school teacher, Ally's story is dominated by her initial belief that she

was not smart enough to teach at a classical school. She was a career changer eager to find a

profession she was passionate about. Her initial confidence came from feeling called to be a

teacher. Her first year was challenging especially because she had to learn the curriculum and did

not feel like the training she received before the start of school was especially helpful to her

preparation to teach. She worked very hard to learn the curriculum, even practicing the phonics

program on her husband every evening. No one also told her about the school's culture in terms

of routines and student expectations. When her immediate supervisor observed her about half-

way through the year, she bluntly told her that the students were the ones controlling the class,

not her. This event was the turning point for Ally as she realized how to implement the desired

culture in the classroom. Additionally, the observation led to a conversation in which Ally's

supervisor validated Ally's understanding of the phonics curriculum. This experience was a huge

boost to her confidence, and Ally would develop a strong relationship with her supervisor and

teammates, while setting appropriate boundaries for work-life balance. She achieved self-actualization by thriving in an environment where she could be herself, teach students, relish their "ah ha moments," when they truly understood the content, and embrace continuous improvement.

Greg

In a most eloquent and thoughtful way, Greg shared how difficult but rewarding the profession of teaching can be for any educator. He did not mince words regarding the difficulty of teaching, grading, staying organized, and needing time for himself and his family. Although his background was in higher education, Greg found his way to a school where a built-in community of close friends already existed. Already knowledgeable and passionate about the content, Greg's challenge was to balance his teaching responsibilities with the reality that teaching can be all-encompassing of one's life. Over the course of his first year, Greg grew as a teacher, especially in lesson planning and learning to create opportunities for "ah ha moments" in the classroom. He also made progress in his organization and time management, areas he acknowledged where growth was needed. Greg was pleasantly surprised with the support he received, especially from parents, and continues to find value and meaning in the work he does each day.

Emma

From the time she was young, Emma always wanted to be a teacher. This feeling derived from her own love of history and her desire to share this knowledge with children. In her first year, Emma struggled with her confidence and delivery of instruction, but she made steady and effective progress over the year, especially in her level of student questioning. This improvement was due in part to her school's system of frequent observation and coaching, and Emma

appreciated her supportive school leader. Emma built strong relationships with her team and enjoyed being a part of a collaborative school community. Emma has grown to realize how challenging teaching is and how much she still must learn. She now accepts this idea with more grace for herself than she did her first year. Emma is very clear on her purpose as a teacher and knows she is doing what she is supposed to be doing each day in the classroom.

Will

Will is a career changer, forced out of his previous work due to a health condition. What Will lacked as far as knowledge of pedagogy, he made up for in terms of his passion for the content. Will was excited for the opportunity to teach at a classical charter school which emphasized things that were also important to him – citizenship, virtue, and an understanding that a proper education in history provides students with a foundation in true patriotism. Once the school year began, he quickly experienced the challenges of being a first-year teacher. Lesson planning and pacing, building positive relationships with students while still being a disciplinarian, not taking things personally, learning how to say "no" for the sake of work-life balance, and how to teach students from all backgrounds were among his greatest challenges. However, Will did not give up despite an initially difficult transition. Throughout the hard work, Will fell in love with teaching and the school and cannot see himself in any other setting. To his credit, Will embraced an attitude of accepting constructive feedback, a desire to collaborate with teachers and administration alike, and the joy of being involved with the school culture outside of the classroom. Will's invigorating story reveals what can happen when a teacher realizes they are truly accomplishing their purpose.

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Jane

Jane knew she had a passion for teaching and working with children but believed this desire would manifest itself through youth ministry in a church setting. While she was successful in this career, it was very demanding and after taking some time away from work to focus on raising her young children, she eventually classically homeschooled her children, believing the content and curriculum was a better fit for her family than what was being offered in the traditional public school. When a new classical charter school opened, Jane applied as a teacher assistant to ease back into a career outside her home. After spending one year in a non-classroom teacher role, she transitioned full-time into the classroom. Jane's first year was challenging as she struggled to effectively deliver lessons that met the needs of all students and build routines and expectations conducive to learning. She also struggled slightly with her team who were reluctant at first to share their resources with her until she could demonstrate the ability to pull her own weight. But Jane demonstrated a steadfast approach to growth and improvement and her proactive desire to resolve conflict and seek out feedback from administration drove her immense growth, which resulted in increased success in the classroom. She also showed she could pull her own weight and was appreciative of her team although her strongest areas of support remained her friends and family outside of school.

Heidi

Heidi always loved art but growing up, school was not her favorite, and she did not originally anticipate being a teacher. An experience working at an art summer camp while in college changed this perspective, and she pursued a master's in teaching right after completion of her undergraduate degree. Heidi was drawn to her school due to the difference she felt in the interview process where the administration seemed more interested in her excitement for art and

less interested in her ability to fundraise for her own supplies. Upon accepting the job, Heidi

realized the content-rich curriculum would allow her to teach her passion of art history rather

than just arts and crafts all day long. Over the course of the year, Heidi learned how to develop

good classroom management routines. Her high points included watching students grow in their

love and appreciation for art, something she tried to model for them each day. Heidi enjoyed

working collaboratively on a team as a founding member of her faculty and developed strong

relationships with her fellow teachers, administrators, and students. She has demonstrated great

resilience during some personal health concerns and clearly recognized the importance of

prioritizing teacher health and well-being, especially after her own inability to establish work-life

balance during her first year.

Kendra

Kendra always knew she wanted to be a teacher and pursued double certification in

elementary education and special education. Upon moving to a new state, she began applying to

jobs in charter schools knowing this opportunity would give her some initial flexibility while her

licenses transferred. Kendra was not familiar with the classical model but was drawn to its

emphasis on a liberal arts education that met the needs of the whole child, not just emotionally,

but also in terms of character and virtue. She accepted a job as a middle school special education

teacher. During her first-year, Kendra was fortunate to share a classroom with a more

experienced special education teacher who provided support, encouragement, and training to her

each day. Both teachers opened their classroom every day during lunch period to the other

middle school teachers creating a daily "lunch bunch" that allowed for significant collaboration

among general education and special education teachers. This positive work environment

allowed the students, including Kendra's, to make significant academic progress. Kendra used

her strength at math instruction to support her students. She believed she had a very successful

first year but shared more struggles during her second year including a lack of collaboration with

middle and upper school faculty and decreased planning time with more preps. Although she is

thankful that this year has brought a more unified approach between special education and

administration, she lacks the ability to partner with general education teachers on a more

consistent basis.

Laura

Laura's story is one that has come full circle. Initially wanting to teach younger students

how to read, Laura earned a degree in elementary education. The opportunity to travel and

ultimately live overseas drew Laura into working with higher education ESOL students. The

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Laura's job prospects led her to explore an option as a K-12

ESOL teacher at a classical charter school. Laura's responsibilities today are to work with a wide

range of students, in terms of grades and abilities, supporting them specifically in their language

growth and acquisition. Laura thrives in the K-12 setting where she can develop strong

relationships with the students and their general education teachers. Her strong collaboration

skills have led her to appreciate the school's strengths and build further community within her

immediate team and the faculty at large. While the adjustment to a K-12 setting had its

challenges, including learning what it means to be a support teacher, Laura continues to be eager

to grow and learn how best to support her students each day.

Chelsea

As a special education teacher Chelsea's story is one of recognition that she does not

have to be the perfect teacher. Chelsea took her work seriously during her first year and did not

find a healthy work-life balance. She also struggled with a demanding parent and attempted to

handle it herself rather than seek support and escalate as needed from supervisors and administrators. Additionally, she did not have a planning period and did not get observed her entire first year. Despite these tremendous challenges, she enjoyed the work she did with the students and grew in knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. She received feedback from her supervisor late in the year that her parents were extremely supportive of her. This experience has enabled her to grow more confident in her ability as a teacher and achieve greater self-actualization by recognizing both her personal and professional growth.

Washington Classical Academy

Washington Classical Academy (WCA) currently serves grades K-12. Having opened as a K-8 school in 2014, the school has graduated five classes of seniors. With an enrollment of just under 700 students, over 450 households are represented in the student body. The racial composition is as follows: 71% of the student body is white, 13% black, 7% multi-racial, 6% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Furthermore, 9.24% of the students are economically disadvantaged and 7% have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Washington's highly successful track record has led to a waitlist of nearly 1,500 students. The school is recognized for its academic success and pedagogical best practices by its authorizing district and its relationship with an institution of higher learning. Four teachers from WCA participated in the research study. Two of the teachers taught exclusively within the upper school and were in their second year of teaching. The other two teachers were based in the student services department, working with students on IEPs or ESOL and served multiple grades, although primarily students in the upper school years.

Lincoln Classical Academy

Lincoln Classical Academy (LCA) was founded as a replication of WCA and currently serves K-9. Having opened as a K-6 school in 2021, the school expanded to K-8 during the 2022-2023 school year and added 9th grade for the 2023-2024 school year. It will continue to grow to 12th grade by adding one grade per year, graduating its first class in 2026. The school serves about 728 students and has over 1,400 on the waitlist. Demographically, 60% of its students are white, 21% are black, 15% are Hispanic, and just over 3% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Nearly 30% of the students are economically disadvantaged with special education students composing 12% of the student body. Like WCA, LCA is also affiliated with an institution of higher learning that supports curriculum and instruction. Six teachers participated in the research study from LCA. Four of them taught in the elementary grades, one of them being an art teacher. One teacher taught middle school history and the final teacher worked in special education with the middle and upper school grades. Interestingly, three of the teachers have the experience of beginning their teaching careers the same year the school opened although Jane was with the school in its first year as a teacher assistant, rather than in a full-time teaching role. This perspective of being a first-year teacher at a first-year school offered an additionally unique insight into their experiences. The other three teachers are in their second-year teaching.

Results

This section discusses the data analysis results based on the themes and sub-themes identified from the ground-up within the research. Transcripts from semi-structured interviews, pre- and post-interview journals, and artifacts that teachers provided as representative examples from their first year were manually coded by identifying themes across questions, journal responses, and artifacts. NVIVO qualitative coding software verified the manual coding process

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by helping to organize the data, and then confirmed the codes by locating the connections that could be categorized into themes. Coding was organized based on participant responses and data triangulation occurred among the three data collection methods. The semi-structured interviews were open-ended and ranged from approximately thirty to forty-five minutes in which participants reflected upon their first year. Journal responses featured four questions (with an optional fifth question allowing for feedback to the researcher) in which participants offered reflections on teaching before and after the interview. Finally, participants also provided physical documents and artifacts from their first year which were then analyzed for other potential themes. The three themes discussed are beginning anxieties, "work begets love," and self-actualization.

Beginning Anxieties

Based on participant feedback, first year teachers in classical charters were most confident in their content knowledge but were significantly less confident in their ability to teach it to their students. Of the ten participants, eight indicated that content knowledge was a strength. Greg, for example, believed he would "get students interested in literature and make them care." Additionally, five participants expressed strengths in working with children, such as Ally who stated, "I was confident in my ability to work with children and really just my ability to connect with children." Emma noted confidence in both "my love of history," and her prior experience working with children in various settings led her to believe she would "probably feel comfortable in the classroom." On the other end of the spectrum, all ten teachers reported significant anxieties prior to their first year. While starting a new job can be anxious for anyone, the reason for this anxiety stemmed from fears over their ability to do the job well, indicating low feelings of self-actualization among the first-year teachers. Despite not fully knowing what the year

would bring, the participants seemed to know the great responsibility that comes with educating

students "devours your life" as stated by Greg. Fundamentally, many teachers shared Will's

anxiety where he questioned "Am I even capable of providing these children with an education"?

This lack of self-efficacy was characteristic of teachers regardless of content knowledge comfort

or prior experience working with children.

"Your Kids Are Walking All Over You"

Six participants explicitly stated their anxieties centered around classroom management

and student behavior. Ally struggled with classroom management during her first year to the

point where her school leader bluntly told her that her students "are walking over you, fix it."

Heidi described teaching in addition to the challenge of managing her Type 1 Diabetes during a

pandemic, as like "leading a meeting all day with 25... kids." While Jane had extensively worked

with children in a church setting, she was worried that the structure and rigor of a classical

charter school could pose a challenge to her less formal tone in past settings. Furthermore, Jane

acknowledged her natural demeanor to be "more motherly loving" and that as a teacher she

would need to set clear rules and procedures with her "stern mother voice." In her first full-time

job after college, Lisa recalled being very anxious with classroom management, afraid to hurt the

feelings of younger students, and concerned whether "they're actually going to grow"

academically. Lisa acknowledged that classroom management had been one of her challenges

during her student teaching experience and carried this anxiety, especially in relation to her

ability to teach students, into her first year.

"Can I Actually Do This"?

Lisa's concern about whether she could effectively teach the students was widely shared

among the participants. This feeling created a sense of imposter syndrome, referenced explicitly

by Emma and Will, over their ability to convey this content knowledge to their students.

"Imposter syndrome is so strong," Emma admitted upon reflecting on her feelings leading into

the first year. Emma characterized this imposter syndrome as questioning her ability to teach:

"can I actually do this? Do I actually know the material well"? Similarly, Ally expressed, "I feel

like I'm not very smart" and as a result, it was a "huge anxiety" that "I would teach them

incorrectly." Will was concerned about his inexperience in managing a classroom and planning

lessons. He reflected that his pre-teaching anxieties led him "compare myself to other people"

fearing "that I don't live up to these people" he knew already teaching in classical charter

schools. While these feelings of self-doubt may be understandable for new teachers, it is worth

noting that Emma, Ally, and Will did not complete any formal teaching preparation or student

teaching, which is characteristic to many charter schoolteachers who bypass traditional teacher

certification routes (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022).

"Work Begets Love"

Whether or not they were familiar with classical education, participants seemed to share

Greg's assessment of teaching that "Work Begets Love" in that the effectiveness of the school's

culture, developed an intrinsic appreciation and love of their teaching responsibilities. For many

of the participants, these ideas were what attracted them to the job in the first place. Eight

teachers shared an underlying theme that their school's traditional, liberal arts, classical

curriculum was appealing to them in addition to the emphasis on the explicit teaching of virtue

(three participants) and mission (two participants). This approach was perceived by Emma as

being different in that "the things we value (in reference to the curriculum) ... have become less

important to a lot of other schools." Laura and Will were both referred to their school by friends

or colleagues (Will's friend taught at Washington Classical Academy). Though they both

acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with classical education at the time they applied to the school, they were ultimately won over by its tenets. In her role working with ESOL students, Laura noted the importance that "classical education should be accessible to all kids,", while Will expressed his excitement to teach "genuine American history" in class demonstrating appreciation for the curriculum. Similarly, Heidi, who was also not familiar with classical education, was impressed with the "content-rich" curriculum that had "third graders that are learning things that I did not learn until college," specifically regarding art history and technique. Despite the challenges of the first year, participants generally reflected on being impressed with the curriculum and culture of the school and the positive effect it had on the students.

First Year in a First Year School

As first year teachers in a first-year school, Lisa and Heidi shared their common experience of being founding faculty members at Lincoln Classical Academy. As charter schools continue to grow and expand across the nation, more first year teachers may also experience this phenomenon of beginning their careers at a brand-new school. Heidi honestly stated that there were some "blessings and cursings" in working on a founding faculty suggesting that prospective teachers considering this opportunity should expect that "it's going to be kind of like a roller coaster." Nonetheless, she still acknowledged there was something still "special" about a smaller faculty figuring things out together during that first year. In recalling the first day of the new school, Lisa fondly remembered that even though she was very nervous, the students themselves were also "all very nervous, especially since it was a new school... none of them knew each other." Lisa interestingly commented that she was thankful to have been a first-year teacher in the first year of a school because she did not feel "like the new teacher" or "the odd one out" because "everyone is basically kind of new" and can rally around the experience of learning

things together as a faculty. While first year teachers in this setting will still experience challenges, there may be some positive opportunities to grow with the school from its earliest stages in its first year.

"Fallen in Love" with Teaching

A key theme shared by all participants was their appreciation and love for the work they did in the classroom. For similar reasons that attracted them to the job in the first place, participants noted that the classical model developed a strong sense of purpose within their daily responsibilities. Despite the intensity of the school year, Greg acknowledged that "the meaning of the work was never in question." Similarly, Will described himself as having "fallen in love" with the classical model despite his initial challenges and anxieties in the classroom. Participants unanimously emphasized the purpose they found in their role as teachers during their first year. Laura described herself as "feeling like this is something I've been called to do." To the question of what made her decide to stay in her position, Ally responded "I love it." Elaborating further, Ally stated that she goes home "feeling very fulfilled and feeling very valued and purposeful." These feelings have developed a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in their work that encouraged the participants to continue their work in the classroom.

Self-Actualization

This research study tried to examine first-year teachers' experiences through the theoretical framework of Maslow's theory of human needs. Teachers who achieved self-actualization, the highest level in Maslow's pyramid, would only do so after their prior needs were sufficiently met. This sense of self-actualization gave teachers a sense of purpose that occurred when anxieties were settled, confidence was built, and an appreciation for the school's approach was understood and implemented.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Physiological Needs

In terms of physiological needs, participants were asked to discuss their work-life balance to explore their opportunity to rest, recover, and take care of themselves when away from work. This concept can be challenging for first year teachers, some of whom wear "working until 7pm every day as a badge of honor," as noted by Heidi in her journal. Of the ten participants, six indicated they achieved some measure of work-life balance accomplished through a variety of ways. Lisa set clear boundaries by informing parents that she would no longer respond to email past a certain point in the day unless it was an emergency, so that she could be present for her family and friends. On the other hand, she ensured that while at work, her phone was not a distraction so she could give her full attention to the students. Will acknowledged, "I had to learn how to say no." By prioritizing time for his own children and for himself, Will made sure he could pause and "just sit on my couch with no grading, no paperwork, no laptop."

However, not all teachers were as successful as Lisa and Will. Greg stated that work-life balance is the "white whale of teachers" comparing the school year and its demands to "quicksand" in that "the more you say yes to things, the further in you sink and then you're... stuck or... drowning." Chelsea struggled to find work-life balance in her first year due in part to not having a single planning period during the school day. Chelsea stated that she "took my job home with me every day" admitting that she not only prepared lessons at home, but also constantly checked her email to see if she received a message from the aggressive parent of a student on her caseload. This additional stress caused Chelsea to feel "like I was working 24 hours a day except when I was sleeping." Heidi also acknowledged that she "didn't know what work-life balance was" during her first year due to the tremendous effort she put into lesson plan

preparation. To best solve this problem for the future, Heidi spent time over the summer refining her lesson plans, which helped her tremendously in her second year.

Safety Needs

While there was no indication that any of the participants felt physically unsafe in their schools, it was important that participants felt secure enough within their jobs to receive feedback to help them grow and learn from their mistakes. All participants expressed the desire to continue growing by acknowledging how much improvement occurred during their first year. Lisa, who previously acknowledged that "in the beginning (of the school year) I was not confident in anything" struggled with one of her first observations. Despite receiving praise for her students being "energetic and engaged" during one of her math lessons, Lisa became discouraged when her school leader suggested they meet to discuss the math curriculum further. Lisa acknowledged that she reacted defensively before realizing that the feedback was provided with the goal of improving her teaching and helping student growth. She ultimately appreciated the feedback, recognizing it was just another way the school was attempting to support her teaching. Similarly, an observation Ally received became a key turning point during her first year. Ally shared that she was never explicitly told "what the culture of the school was" and thus she did not know the correct expectations regarding student behavior and conduct in class. Upon receiving one of her first observations, Ally's school leader gave her constructive feedback on her classroom décor and expectations while also praising her phonics instruction. Rather than becoming defensive, Ally realized a lack of information was the issue and "did a 180 in the classroom." Though Lisa and Ally first received constructive feedback differently, the result was that they felt safe enough to implement and embrace it, recognizing their growth was key to student learning.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Love Needs

For first year teachers, love needs can be characterized as an effective support system, ideally both inside and outside of school. Eight participants noted that their colleagues were among their primary sources of support during the first year, with five relying more on their family and friends outside school. Laura characterized her school experience as "like a family" in that "everyone is just so helpful and kind and will go the extra mile for things." Alternatively, Jane's primary network of support was based outside of school as her family, specifically her sister who is also a teacher, and a strong group of friends with whom she felt supported to talk through situations or ask questions in an attempt to avoid the perception that she was "gossiping inside of school." Regardless of where this basis of support was found, participants widely indicated its importance to helping them cope through the challenge of their first years.

Esteem Needs

With proper support in place, new teachers found their esteem needs met, as evidenced by their increased confidence in their work. While a lot of Emma's confidence was connected to her comfort level with the content of her classes, she greatly benefitted from classroom observations acknowledging that she became "addicted" to the opportunity to receive feedback and talk through "what I was doing in class" with her school leader. Emma felt encouraged by this process of growth, which confirmed areas of strength and weakness in her own instruction. She also encouraged new teachers to advocate for themselves, especially at a school where norms and culture may be more established. This advice to advocate for yourself as a first-year teacher was also shared by Ally. As an art teacher Heidi's confidence struggled with the necessity of running a structured classroom with "paint going everywhere." However, by praising her students for the good choices they made and enlisting their help during the actual

lesson allowed her gain further trust in effectively managing her classroom despite acknowledging the ups and downs that characterized the first year. In reflecting upon her first year, Chelsea wrote that if she could go back and tell her first year teacher-self something, she would emphasize "I am equipped for this job and I'm good at educating students." This type of reflection demonstrates the need for new teachers to be praised and encouraged to help build esteem and confidence. All ten participants indicated that their first year could be described as an upward curve, with some variation to the dips and valleys depending on the teacher. This incline suggested that teachers grew more confident in their abilities as the year progressed and learned to adapt and grow within their own unique circumstances and experiences.

Self-Actualization Needs

Self-actualization needs were realized when first year teachers believed that they were fulfilling their vocational purpose at the highest level. While it does not seem that participants needed to fully accomplish each prior step on the pyramid to reach self-actualization (such as work-life balance), prior needs required some aspect of being met, at least in some form. For example, while Greg did not admit to achieving work-life balance, he did acknowledge that teaching has taught him to manage his time and improve his organization. Meanwhile, Kendra's story reflects the pride teachers experience when their students succeed. As a special education teacher, Kendra was tasked with working with students with disabilities who often struggled in the classroom. In sharing her experience developing and teaching a foundational math class, Kendra noted that her students' Math MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) scores "were coming in at a 13%… and then I got them all the way up to a 65 just with this curriculum." It was evident that Kendra was extremely proud of her success in math instruction. Along with her students, who also felt more confident in math, Kendra's self-actualization was rooted in the

realization that she could effectively teach and help her students. Despite the ups and downs of his first year, Will persevered through the challenges of managing a classroom, properly pacing his lessons, and building healthy rapport with his students. By the middle of his second-year teaching, Will confidently stated that, "my journey's over and I'm really, really happy about that." Noting that this feeling is the first time he has "felt like I belonged anywhere," Will's self-actualization in his role and his school is clear and was probably the strongest among all participants.

Teacher Experiences at WCA Compared with LCA

Participants shared many common experiences, especially regarding a healthy school culture, although growing pains were more often felt at LCA. This finding is not surprising given how both schools shared similar founding members, curriculums, core virtues, and mission alignment. At WCA, Greg, Emma, and Laura emphasized the strong sense of community with Laura describing it as a place where "everyone is helpful, and kind and we'll go the extra mile for things." Greg characterized the culture as one where teachers are "interested in what's going on with each other's classes." Emma recalled the healthy team dynamics she experienced in her first year, stating her department "was very close." While Chelsea spoke less directly of the community, her positive experience with more veteran teachers is seen in her artifact selections – a math textbook, and the novel, *The Wind in the Willows.* The math textbook represented the growth she experienced in the curriculum, while *The Wind in the Willows*, which she co-taught with a more experienced teacher, showed her themes of "friendship, love, [and] sacrifice" which she described as the same themes she learned and grew from during her first of teaching.

Teachers at LCA also praised the strong team dynamics while noting the challenges of a school in its first or second year. Will commented on the lack of organization and confusing

expectations especially regarding behavior management that made it feel like his team was on

"this little island on our own." While Jane embraced a positive attitude toward constructive

criticism, she noted that others did not, and some teachers could be seen "crying after having a

meeting with administration." Heidi commented that some of the challenges may have been the

weaker communication in the second year that accompanied the growth of the school, which can

be attributed to the ongoing challenges of founding and growing a school. Despite these

difficulties, participants from LCA were positive about their support from administration and in

the collegiality that has developed among the faculty. Kendra praised the administration for

being "very available" and responsive to any questions she had or support she needed. Healthy

work culture was critical for Ally who described her team as "amazing" in terms of answering

her "million questions" and becoming her "#1 support system" for curriculum, classroom

management, and encouragement. Characterizing her team as a "tremendous help," Lisa was

grateful for the support they provided her in classroom management, communicating with

parents, and even staying hours after dismissal to help her organize her classroom effectively. It

was clear from all the participants that despite WCA and LCA being in different stages, healthy

school culture and community were significant contributors in the first-year teacher experience.

Outlier Data and Findings

Three outliers or unexpected findings were identified during the data collection and

analysis process. For the most part, there was significant consensus among the participants

within both the individual interviews and the journal entries which resulted in the development

of similar themes. Nine of the ten participants also chose a lesson plan or classroom observation

as their artifact showing the emphasis on instructional growth and confidence over their first

year. However, these outliers speak to the reality that each teacher will have a different

understanding of their first year based on their own setting, perception, and experience in the classroom.

Chelsea's Anxiety

Chelsea stated that she was not initially anxious when she began teaching at her school and is an outlier due to her unique pathway into WCA. Due to beginning as a long-term substitute, Chelsea did not initially experience the full weight of her job responsibilities. However, once Chelsea officially accepted a teaching position, she did acknowledge anxieties regarding the full weight of her job especially around following the student's IEP and building "the right relationship with parents." Chelsea also acknowledged that her first year was characterized by a difficult parent who made it hard for her to establish appropriate boundaries and work-life balance.

Second Year Harder Than the First

Of all the participants, Kendra was the only one who indicated that her second year of teaching was more challenging than her first year. While this question was not specifically asked of the participants, Kendra acknowledged having significantly more struggles in her second year than in her first year. Kendra enjoyed this collaboration between general education and special education teachers, but in her second year, for various reasons, she felt less connected to the middle and upper schoolteachers. One reason for the lack of positive collaboration is that she now has "six preps for one planning [period] a day" due to the staffing issues within the special education department. This extra pressure and less amount of time has added additional anxiety to Kendra that was not present during her first year.

Lisa's Decision to Stay

While nine participants strongly indicated a sense of love and purpose as reasons connected to their decision to stay teaching, Lisa's rationale did not explicitly say that she found her work valuable and meaningful, although she did express a "love" and appreciation for her school's willingness to ask for feedback and improvement at the end of every school year. Lisa also expressed strong support for her school's emphasis on virtues and how they are incorporated throughout the school day as another reason she decided to stay teaching at her school. While the researcher believes Lisa finds meaning, love, and purpose in her vocation, her response reflected a different emphasis than the other participants, making it an outlier.

Research Question Responses

This section answers the research questions developed to best understand the experiences of first year teachers in classical charter schools. Data from the three sources of individual interviews, journal entries, and physical documents and artifacts provided the foundation for the responses to the research questions.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Participants generally described the first year as extremely challenging but also extremely rewarding. Emma shared in her journal that first year teachers may need to accept that "hard is normal" but to remember that "you will not always be doing everything for the first time." Jane described the first year as "a lot like drinking from a fire hydrant" as there was so much to learn all at once. All teachers indicated growth over the year, especially in their knowledge of the curriculum (eight participants), classroom management (four participants), and teaching a wide range of students (two participants). Upon recalling her first few weeks of

teaching, Emma shared, "I don't think I've ever been more exhausted in my life, like mentally, physically, emotionally, just from the stress." Greg, similarly, stated that "the first two months are probably going to be really hard" for anyone beginning their teaching career. Yet despite this challenge, Emma does not view the year as traumatic or characterized by some of the horror stories she heard from other first year teachers, but rather "confirmation that this is what I want to do." Almost identically to Emma, Greg characterized the adjustment to teaching as "Standing constantly, talking constantly, never having solitude, being alert for so many constructive hours." However, he goes on to write in his journal entries that "work begets love" as "You will get used to teaching. By the end of the year, it will feel satisfying, under control, almost calm. It will be extremely rewarding." Insightfully, Heidi wrote in her journal the need for first year teachers to give themselves grace for this learning experience while recognizing" that you are still a student" in these early years of teaching. Within the challenge of teaching, it was clear that the participants were all connected with, in some form, the intrinsic reward of serving others through education that made the challenges of the first year worth the difficulties.

Sub-Question One

Which types of professional development are effective for first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Participants shared examples of both effective professional development such as curriculum guides and targeted support, and less effective professional development, especially larger group sessions. Both Heidi and Chelsea shared that whole group faculty meetings could be challenging due to the larger setting and less relevant material for everyone present. As a result, these meetings became a "stressor" for Chelsea who was already overwhelmed with the amount of information she encountered daily as a first teacher. Will and Jane appreciated the chance to

attend summer conference training at the institution of higher learning the school is affiliated

with, although Emma noted that sometimes such sessions, although helpful, were "never really

earth shattering as far as the content you get." Ally shared that her pre-service training was not as

helpful due to the content not covering the material she would teach. However, she was very

positive about her school's relationship with the institution of higher learning which provided the

existing curricular framework she used. Referring to the curriculum guide by the nickname her

students chose, "the Big Blue Book," Ally utilized this resource to ensure she was lesson

planning and pacing correctly. Because the Big Blue Book broke down the topics in every

subject by month, this resource gave Ally the confidence "knowing that I was on the right track,

my kids are going to be OK because I covered everything for this month." Like Ally, Will

commented on the ineffectiveness of his school's pre-school year training saying that he spent a

good deal of time "in my room by myself." Also, like Ally, Chelsea was appreciative of having

an established curriculum with materials. She shared the story of a sixth-grade teacher with the

school since its start. Chelsea acknowledged that the reason "I got really good at math" was due

to his willingness to sit down with her every week and "teach me how to teach." While this

relationship was not formalized as a mentor/mentee arrangement, Chelsea benefited from

individualized training in the curriculum from a teacher willing to give his time so that she might

gain confidence with the students.

Sub-Question Two

Which types of administrative support are effective for first-year teachers in classical

charter schools?

All ten participants indicated they received support from a school leader or an immediate

supervisor. Participants at WCA primarily drew on support from upper school principal while

participants at LCA relied on the dean of academics. This support was key in the decision to remain teaching as Greg was appreciative his school leaders were willing to check in on him and engage in "real conversations" despite their busy schedules. Jane shared her craving for growth and self-improvement drove her to seek help proactively saying, "if I felt like there was something I wasn't doing right, I was in [the dean of academics] office." Jane would go so far as to invite the administrator into the room asking her to be "brutally honest" recognizing "that's the only way you're going to get better." Will described his school leader as his "biggest champion." Like Jane, Will would often seek out feedback through his own initiative, accepting constructive criticism, and leaving encouraged by the feedback received. Administrators who provide this type of feedback help first year teachers grow in confidence and efficacy, though it is worth noting that both Jane and Will characterize themselves as taking on the initiative to connect with their administrators and embracing an attitude of accepting constructive feedback. Other teachers may react defensively, like how Lisa received one of her first observations. Ultimately, all participants showed the desire and willingness to accept feedback, especially once trust was established with their school leader.

Sub-Question Three

How can mentoring and peer relationships improve the experience of first-year teachers in classical charter schools?

Mentoring and relationships played a critical and positive role in the experience of most of the participants, especially if they taught within the same field. Eight teachers noted the positive role the school community or healthy team dynamics played in their first year. As a first-year teacher, Kendra was fortunate enough to share a classroom with Grace, a more experienced special education teacher. This relationship created an environment where Kendra

was mentored informally by Grace who, together hosted "lunch bunch" every day in their classroom for all the general education teachers. This gathering encouraged the teachers to ask questions freely, exchange ideas, and build healthy team dynamics. Grace also showed Kendra how to blend the worlds of special education and classical education, and Kendra acknowledged that she viewed Grace as her mentor over the year. Similarly, Heidi's fellow art teacher Alice had previous teaching experience that helped her offer advice, answer questions, and be a source of encouragement and support. Together, they collaborated on Heidi's artifact, the first yearbook of the school, an accomplishment which Heidi considered to be indicative of the effort she put into her first year. For both Kendra and Heidi, the fact that their de facto "mentor" teachers taught within the same discipline helped provide a natural connection and position of support to new teachers entering the same or a similar field. Ultimately all participants acknowledged that positive peer relationships played an essential role in their successful first year.

Summary

While all participants shared their ups and downs and the many challenges to their first year of teaching, all reached a level of self-actualization that encouraged their return the following year. Although first-year teachers experienced many anxieties, they were ultimately able to find purpose and appreciation for their work, as Greg noted, "The more work you put into a class or a student... the more you love them." Ally referred to these highlights of student learning as "ah ha moments" where students realize, appreciate, and love what is being taught. Comradery and community were very important to all participants to prevent feelings of isolation. Maslow's theory of human needs provided a vital framework to ensuring that self-actualization goals could be reached, providing school leaders with the ability to best serve teachers earliest, and most vulnerable, in their career.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The study explores the first-year experience of teachers in classical charter schools. Additional sub-questions focus on professional development, administrators, and mentoring and peer relationships as other avenues of support for educators in the beginning of their careers. Ten participants from two different schools were asked to reflect on their first year. The two schools shared much in common in terms of their curriculum, mission, and focus on providing a virtue-driven, classical education to their students. Semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and teacher selected physical documents or artifacts were the three data collection tools and were triangulated to ensure accuracy in themes. A case study analysis (Yin, 2018) was used to best understand the experience of each teacher within their setting. NVIVO qualitative coding software further confirmed the analysis of the manual coding process. This chapter consists of the following five subsections (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand the challenging experience of first-year teachers at existing classical charter schools in the United States of America**.** Participants who are no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching were asked to reflect on their most positive and challenging experiences to determine what caused them to remain in the teaching profession. Research is scarce on the first-year experience of teachers in charter schools, especially within the growing classical model. As a result of the data collection and analysis, significant themes emerged from the case study experiences of teachers

bound within their first year, that have implications for school leaders on best practices related to

teacher training and development. The research findings align with the theoretical frameworks

and previous empirical research especially in the application of Maslow's ideas to teachers who

achieved self-actualization. Further findings also support the research described in Chapter Two.

For example, regarding effective support for beginning teachers, Emma greatly benefited from a

culture of coaching due to the strength of the feedback received, an observation that Wilcoxen et

al. (2021) previously noted.

Interpretation of Findings

This section summarizes themes and sub-themes discussed in Chapter Four. First year

teachers were significantly anxious at the beginning of their teaching careers. While generally

confident in their content knowledge and ability to work with other children, many questioned

their capacity to manage the many responsibilities that accompany teaching while questioning

their adeptness to provide their students with an education. The participants shared significant

alignment as to what attracted them to teach at a classical charter school, especially the emphasis

on a traditional liberal arts curriculum paired with the explicit teaching of virtue. Despite the

challenges of teaching, belief in these ideas was among the primary reasons the participants

chose to return as a love of the curriculum, of the school's mission, and a strong sense of purpose

contributed to the feeling that they have "fallen in love" with their vocation. The overlap of

Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the needs of first year teachers can be accomplished through the

ability to establish work-life balance (physiological needs), feel able to make mistakes and

receive constructive feedback (safety needs), build an effective support system (love needs), gain

further confidence in the classroom (esteem needs), and find meaning and purpose in their work

(self-actualization).

Summary of Thematic Findings

Ten teachers from varying roles and grade levels, who were no more than three years removed from their first year of teaching, shared their experience through semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and an artifact that characterized their first year. Based on an analysis of the data, the three identified themes from this study are: beginning anxieties, "work begets love," and self-actualization. From the themes, school leaders should be challenged to explore opportunities to effectively teach first year teachers the skills they need to persevere while creating an environment conducive to self-actualization.

"Teaching is Hard" but Mission Matters

"Teaching is hard" Emma reflected in her journal, noting that at times, she set "unrealistic expectations" for herself that made her first year even more challenging. Despite the difficulties of teaching, all participants expressed strong alignment with the school's mission which contributed to their love for and appreciation of their work. This alignment is especially important considering that research has shown that new teacher burnout leads directly to higher rates of teacher turnover (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Given the statistics on charter schoolteacher turnover, it is likely that at least a few of the four participants who struggled with work-life balance would have been especially prone to turnover (Gulosino et al., 2019). While the intensity of the school year and workload may be challenging, personal buy-in of the school's mission and vision, even for teachers initially less familiar with the classical model, proved to be a positive indicator for retention in nearly all of the participants. The teachers enjoyed their experiences in the classrooms, especially the "ah ha moments" when students also grasped the joy, complexity, and comprehension of the content.

"This Was My Dream Job" ... But...

While new teachers experience many initial anxieties, imposter syndrome created a lack of confidence and doubt in their ability to educate effectively. It is understandable that teachers would take seriously the responsibility of educating students while also feeling the weight of the responsibility this reality brings– in fact, successful teachers are likely to feel both at times. In reflecting upon how she felt about her first year, Ally recognized teaching "was my dream job" but went on to rightly admit "You do not have to know everything on the first day." Participants universally recognized and appreciated the progress they made over their first year and were fortunate that their school cultures supported the idea of continuous improvement. Research has shown that when teachers work within environments of trust and care they are likelier to flourish, and retention will be higher, a finding that supports a more social constructivist approach in that teachers should allow their experiences to "reaffirm their commitment to their students and profession" despite any anxieties or concerns regarding their ability to deliver the content. (Grillo & Kier, 2021).

"I Hope... to Retire from Here"

Will's words, that he hopes to retire from his job as a teacher, demonstrate the result of a teacher who has achieved a sense of self-actualization. By maintaining a dedicated sense of purpose in their work, all participants chose to continue teaching, even after their first year. Their retention in teaching is consistent with Maslow's ideas of esteem needs, ultimately building toward self-actualization. While research has found that higher rates of teacher turnover are often caused by factors such as poor working conditions (Burkhauser, 2017), it has also noted that building stronger teacher efficacy leads to higher job satisfaction (Granziera & Perera, 2019). Chelsea wrote that "teaching has helped me to be at my best as not only an educator, but also an

individual" suggesting that self-actualization in her vocation also led to positive effects in other aspects of her life. While the first-year experience may still be challenging, with supports in place that help build teacher efficacy, such as a coaching, training, and positive team dynamics, teachers were found to be likelier to enjoy their work thereby increasing their desire to remain in the profession.

Implications for Policy or Practice

From the data analysis, there are recommended suggestions for policy and practice for school districts and leaders. To effectively support new teachers, district and school administrators should strive to focus on developing support that teaches teachers efficacy and self-actualization. Recommendations have considered budget constraints and other limiting factors contextual to most charter schools. Implications for policy, which are more directed at school districts, and implications for practice, which are more directed at school leaders, are discussed below.

Implications for Policy

Districts should attempt to organize and if necessary, consolidate administrative responsibilities carefully so that the bulk of administrators can provide direct, hands-on support to their teachers. Chelsea arguably struggled in her role as a special education teacher due to the due to inconsistent support and was unsure at times how to escalate concerns to her supervisors. On the other hand, Emma greatly benefited from a "culture of coaching" at her school in which she was not only observed frequently but also possessed the ability to verbally process with her school leader. Many schools turn to instructional coaches to support this responsibility, and although this study did not explore that component, it can conclude the influential role school leaders played in all 10 participants by ensuring they felt supported and encouraged as first year

teachers. While exact administrator responsibilities vary by district, research has shown that new

teachers are greatly influenced by the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of their school leadership

(Kim, 2019).

Additionally, districts should support the creation of a mentor program. While

implementation and selection may be determined at the school level, modest funds can be

appropriated for teachers who are going the extra mile to support new teachers such as Kendra's

experience with Grace and Heidi's experience with Alice. In her journal Kendra noted that if she

did not have access to Grace's support, "I would have felt like I was drowning." Neither Grace

nor Alice served in an official mentor capacity but the ability of schools to recognize their work

even in a modest financial way, will ensure that no new teacher will completely fall through the

cracks, as Chelsea nearly did during her first year.

Implications for Practice

As a best practice, school administrators should strive to be more proactive in their

communication and support. While Jane and Ally felt supported by their school leader,

comfortable enough to invite them into their classrooms, and eager to seek constructive

feedback, not every new teacher may react in this manner. Lisa, for example, was initially

disappointed and defensive by one of her first observations. Administrators should seek

intentional opportunities to build relationships with new teachers and not consider teacher

observations as their proactive way of reaching out. Informal check-ins, pop-ins to grade level

meetings, and asking teachers to swing by their offices, are three specific examples where school

leaders can proactively be teachers to their teacher, so that their feedback and support can be

more natural and better received.

School leaders should also ensure they relate to their specialized teachers with equal energy to that of their general education teachers. Both special education teachers who participated expressed minimal relationships with their immediate supervisors compared with the experience of the general education teachers. For example, Chelsea went her entire first year without a single observation. In reflecting on these thoughts, Chelsea seemed to suggest this situation may have been her fault: "I wish I would have communicated more... with my supervisor" but truthfully, this impetus is on school leaders to ensure they are proactively checking in to support their teachers. One key moment for Chelsea was when she was told by her superior that she received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the parents on her caseload. This feedback was critical to Chelsea's perception of her successful first year, which up until then was defined by her especially difficult parent, though it is worth noting, she did not receive positive feedback until April, nearly the end of the school year. Similarly, Kendra noted that her biweekly meetings with her supervisor rarely occurred. Special education positions can be challenging for school leadership to fill and train suggesting that more effective support is needed from school leadership (Peyton et.al, 2021). As an art teacher, Heidi recognized that while general education teachers seemed to be more of a priority due to the importance of teaching core classes, she still acknowledged that this feeling led to being "left out." These types of feelings contribute negatively to school culture and school leaders should respond appropriately.

Finally, school leaders should recognize that many more career changers may be entering the teaching profession. While Laura came from an educational background, her experience was in higher education which is a very different experience than the K-12 setting. Will changed careers entirely to enter the teaching profession. Of the 10 participants in the research study, 6 of

them did not originally plan on becoming teachers. Five participants completed teacher preparation programs. This data suggests that many new teachers may lack experience within the K-12 setting and school leaders should work to build school cultures, training programs, and best practices to support teachers regardless of background conducive to long term success.

Implications for Both Policy and Practice

Districts and school leaders can collectively ensure the following implications for both policy and practice. Leaders should ensure that the basic needs of teachers, especially in relation to Maslow's pyramid, are being met. As Greg described, "the pace of life can be pretty humane" and "I don't think anything can prepare you for the intensity of your first of teaching." While the first year can be hard, it provides school leaders with an opportunity to demonstrate strong support. Districts and schools should verify the school's mission is clearly communicated and understood by the teachers as part of the hiring process. This factor attracted many participants into teaching at the school and served as a foundation for a positive school culture as the teachers were guided by the mission and curriculum of the school. Healthy team dynamics and peer relationships were established by all the participants and played a significant role in supporting teachers as they transitioned into the profession.

While districts should ensure that all legal and ethical professional development requirements are met, schools should ensure that professional development opportunities are as helpful and customized as possible. There are times when large group gatherings and training are necessary. However, school leaders should always keep in mind that at least three of the participants noted that whole group faculty sessions were not helpful. Ally's initial training in the phonics program was likely provided to a wide grade span, thus she did not feel like it covered the content she would teach. Will and Jane specifically noted challenges with lesson planning

and pacing during their first years. Perhaps the most helpful example of professional

development was the consistent support Chelsea received from the sixth-grade teacher in math. It

is worth noting that the school's relationship with the institution of higher learning that provided

pedagogical support was met favorably by Will and Jane in part because of the opportunity to

build relationships with their colleagues before the beginning of the school year.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Upon reviewing Maslow's theory of human motivation, the findings of this study are

consistent with past research that the foundational needs of first year teachers must be met before

esteem needs can occur and self-actualization can be attained. Furthermore, it builds on previous

research by defining and exploring the relationship between self-actualization and purpose for

first year teachers. While researchers have related Maslow's theory in school settings, attempts

to use this framework on first year teachers have been far more limited beyond Fisher and

Royster's (2016) application to math teachers.

Furthermore, this study addresses perspectives on teacher burnout and strategies that

helped retain teachers including informal mentoring, administrative support, professional

development, and peer relationships. While these strategies have been shown to be effective,

they shed new light to teachers in charter school settings. The uniqueness of charter schools,

especially classical charter schools, was also explored in Chapter Two and conclusions were

drawn in Chapter Four to provide school leaders with recommendations for continued support of

new teachers to push back against the trend of teacher turnover in charter school settings.

Limitations and Delimitations

Among the limitations of this study included the decision to exclude first year teachers

who chose not to return. It is not clear what in their experience led to this decision and how their

thinking compared to the participants who chose to remain teaching. This study was also conducted in a classical charter school of which there are only a limited number within the United States. Furthermore, as a former teacher and school leader, I had to ensure my own biases did not pollute the data collection. Participants were given the opportunity to review their responses and were promised confidentiality throughout this research study. The researcher selected delimitations including participants needing to be over 18 years old with a college degree. Furthermore, the researcher only focused on full-time teachers in a K-12 American setting who were in their first year at a classical charter school. It also did not focus on teacher assistants or teachers with prior experience, perhaps even with less than four years' experience, in charter schools or classical schools. The study was limited to the first-year teaching experience to understand how this phenomenon could be best supported in a classical charter school setting. Participants were required to be no further than three years removed to maximize their ability to recall the experiences of their first year.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the existing body of literature is limited on the experience of first year teachers, many opportunities for future research exists among first year teachers in public, charter, and private school settings to understand the common or different themes and perspectives that may emerge from the different settings. The influence of preparation, alternative certification, or teachers without any formal training programs should also be explored to determine the effectiveness of these programs, especially in charter school settings. While this study presupposed the first year of teaching would be the most challenging, Kendra's story surprised the researcher because her second year was more challenging. Further research could explore if this example could apply to other teachers as well. Additional case and phenomenological studies could further explore the

experience of first year teachers in charter classical schools, including those who chose to leave the leave the profession. Further research could also expand on the idea of self-actualization and what factors teachers found meaningful and purposeful within their vocation. Finally, further application of Maslow's ideas on first-year teachers could be explored, especially by familiarizing the participants with the theory and framing the questions more specifically to the hierarchy of needs.

Conclusion

The coinciding rise of charter schools and classical education within the United States produces an opportunity to explore attempts at educational reform in schools across the country. The key relationship in education – that being the one between teachers and students – may be easily overlooked in the highly politicized and polarized tone education reform has taken in the national dialogue. While concerns over teacher competencies and shortages will continue, schools should devote their limited time and energy resources toward ensuring they are implementing best practices for teachers at all stages of their career. For teachers at the beginning of their careers, extra attention is required to help them build confidence, esteem, and self-efficacy, that can rise above the challenges and difficulties that come from leading a meeting all day with twenty-five students, each of whom has their own needs, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. It should no longer be assumed that teachers ought to sink or swim during their first year. Rather school leaders must refocus their energies on teaching teachers the strategies, skills, and knowledge they will need to be successful. This responsibility is not solely the work of school leaders. Rather, perhaps their greatest responsibility is to ensure the climate, culture, and mission of the school that they lead, is one conducive to providing all teachers with an opportunity to flourish, so that their students can also flourish.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 28, 2023

Matthew Stone
Jonathan Bracewell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-266 "TEACHING THE TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF FIRST YEAR CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHERS"

Dear Matthew Stone, Jonathan Bracewell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Appendix B

Site Permission – Washington Classical Academy

research this fall

Thu, Jun 22, 2023 at 11:21 AM

Hi Matt,

We can help, though I don't think we have that many teachers that fit that description.

Here's who comes to mind:

let me know if I'm overlooking anyone.

Best,

[Quoted text hidden]

--

Head of School

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Appendix C

Site Permission – Lincoln Classical Academy

█████████████   ███████████████████

Timeline on research

████████████████████████████████   Thu, Jan 26, 2023 at 9:01 AM
To: ████████████████████████████████

Dear Mr. Stone, ████████████████████ would be delighted to support your research in connection with your PhD program according to the terms you and ███████ have discussed. If there is anything that ████████ ███████████ can do for you, please let me know.

Very kindly,

████████████████████████

████████████████████████████

On Thu, Jan 26, 2023 at 8:03 AM ███████████████████████████ wrote:
See below. He needs an email directly from you stating that he has permission to conduct research at ████

████████████████████████

[Quoted text hidden]

Appendix D

Participant Consent Forms
Title of the Project: Teaching the Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study of First Year Charter School Teachers
Principal Investigator: Matthew Stone, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time teacher at a classical charter school in the United States of America, in your second, third, or fourth year of teaching anywhere within the K-12 grade range. Participants must be no further than three years removed from their first year of teaching. They must also have completed their first year of teaching at a classical charter school. In other words, your first year of teaching could not have been earlier than the 2020-2021 school year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the uniquely difficult experience of first-year teachers at existing classical charter school(s) in the United States. Educators will be asked to reflect on their most positive and challenging experiences to determine what caused them to remain in the teaching profession to provide important insights to schools on how best to support their beginning teachers.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Respond to two journal questions before the interview with a minimum of 250 but not exceeding 1000 words. These questions will ask you to reflect on your teaching experience and will be provided via Microsoft Forms. You will be given the opportunity to send your responses to yourself. These responses should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

2. Contribute a physical artifact that provides further insight into your first year teaching. This might be a lesson or unit plan, an evaluation, an observation, a book or token you found helpful, etc. Ideally this artifact would be presented during the interview. This process should take 15 minutes to complete.

3. Participate in a 1-1, audio recorded, in-person interview regarding your first year of teaching. You will be provided the questions in advance. This interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

4. Respond to three final journal questions after the interview via Microsoft Form on your teaching experience following the word counts outlined previously. These responses should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

5. Optional - you will have a chance to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy. This may take up to an hour to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include increased knowledge of the first year teacher experience especially in future schools that are very similar to yours. This understanding will contribute to existing research on best practices for supporting first year teachers.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I am required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher and faculty chair will have access to the records. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and any hardcopy records will be shredded. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years then deleted. The researchers and the members of his doctoral committee will have access to these records.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. The researcher will provide water and a light snack for participants at the time of the interview.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

The researcher serves as an employee of Liberty Classical Schools which manages Northwest Classical Academy in addition to teaching a small number of sections at the school. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, the researcher will ensure that participation is voluntary. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Matthew Stone. You may ask him any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and/or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jonathan Bracewell, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮; our phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, and our email address is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please provide a "living resume" of sorts describing your educational background, experiences working with children, and how you have arrived in your current role as a teacher?

2. What components of the school attracted you to apply and eventually accept the position?

3. What aspects of teaching were you confident in?

4. What were some of your more significant anxieties or areas of concern heading into the job?

5. Did you complete a teacher preparation program?

6. Did you feel prepared for your first year of teaching?

7. What successes did you experience during your first year of teaching?

8. What were some areas of growth you recognized over your first year of teaching?

9. How would you describe your first year of teaching from the following descriptions – up and down intervals, an upward or downward curve, or a consistent flat line?

10. What support did your school attempt to provide you during your first year?

11. Which types of support were helpful?

12. Which types of support were not as helpful?

13. How did you establish work-life balance?

14. Who did you turn to when you had questions or needed encouragement?

15. How effective was your school leader at being available for you?

16. What made you decide to stay in your position?

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

17. Let's discuss the artifact you brought. Why did you select it and how does it relate to your first year of teaching?

Appendix F

Journal Questions

Journal Prompt Questions

1. What advice would you give to teachers in their first year at your school? At any

school?

2. If you could go back in time, what would you tell the first-year teacher version of

yourself?

3. What are some ways you can improve your contributions to your school

community?

4. What has teaching taught you about yourself?

5. Please feel free to provide feedback to me on this process (optional but

encouraged)!

Appendix G

Physical Document/Artifact Requirements

Physical artifacts will be the first method of data collection. While an abundance of paperwork and documentation normally accompanies the teaching profession, it is important to set clear parameters on what teachers may select as helpful evidence of their first-year teaching. Teachers will be asked to voluntarily share artifacts from their first year of teaching which may include observation summaries, evaluations, lesson plans, training plans, and other professional development opportunities. It could also be a book or other resource that they utilized for support and encouragement. These artifacts should show a particular meaningful experience from their first year. In a school setting, it is important to be respectful of the confidentiality of the many documents that teachers have access to so this will be emphasized to teachers when asking them to share. These artifacts will provide more insight into what growth opportunities they may have received during their first-year teaching. A document as simple as a sample lesson plan can provide substantial information on how the teacher is preparing for class, the status of the existing curriculum, and what supports and coaching they might be receiving from the supervisor.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Appendix H

Sample Journal Response

1. What advice would you give to teachers in their first year at your school? At any school?

Some practical advice:

1. Prepare yourself for the first few months to be physically difficult. Standing constantly, talking constantly, never having solitude, being alert for so many consecutive hours: this will empty your brain, strain your muscles, and sour your stomach. But that's okay. Human beings are wickedly adaptable; we can get used to anything. You will get used to teaching. By the end of the year it will feel satisfying, under control, almost calm. It will also be extremely rewarding. Teaching is difficult, taxing, and unpredictable; therefore it is rewarding.

2. Work begets love. If teaching begins to feel boring and stressful, lean in; work harder. The harder you work (on grading, lesson prep, meeting one on one with students, etc.), the more you will love your classes, and the more your students will love you. This is counter-intuitive; you'll be tempted to think that if you feel overwhelmed, you should ease off and give yourself a break, and this is occasionally true, especially if you're sick, but remain open to the opposite possibility. Many times I have been refreshed and energized by working harder.

3. Plan your classes, but don't over-plan, and don't follow plans slavishly. I hope it is obvious that you need to plan every minute of class. At first it might take you 30-60min to plan a class well. That is okay. You'll become more efficient, and develop a sense for how long things will take. At the end of your first year I'd say lesson plans shouldn't take more than 10-15 minutes to make. Once you have your lesson plan, leave room for organicity. I teach American Literature, and often the very best classes are the ones in which students ask a question I didn't plan, and we

spend the rest of class answering that question. Departing from your lesson plan is OK. Go

where the energy is. If your class grows lifeless, abandon your plan. Improvise. Keep your

pedagogical goal in mind, whatever it is, but take risks. Your students will mirror your

excitement. On a related note:

4. Students mirror your attitude toward the subject. If you seem bored and dismissive, your

students will mirror that attitude. If you model enthusiasm and love, your students will be

converted. Usually a dreary class is the teacher's fault.

5. Don't forget how much your families care about you. Your students' families are raising

children, which is terrifying. You are in charge of their child for at least an hour every day. Each

family is trusting you with something precious. They are offering you something deeply

vulnerable: a child still forming their image of the world. You are partly responsible for forming

that image. Parents intuitively feel the profundity of your task. If you do a good job, a decent job,

or even a mediocre job, the parents will be enormously grateful. So talk to them. Accept their

kindness. Teaching hurls you into a community that roots for you desperately.

2. If you could go back in time, what would you tell the first-year teacher version of
   yourself?

First, be aware that your first few months will feel like being inside a washing machine: chaotic,

loud, and disorienting. If your life has hitherto been quiet, adult, and solitary, prepare yourself to

feel assaulted by the relentless energy and decibel level of children. Teaching is a hyper-social

activity, even for human beings, who are hyper-social animals. It is a social frenzy. This is the

challenge of teaching, but also its beauty. You will have more meaningful (potentially life-

changing) interactions with young people in two hours than you might otherwise in ten years.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

This is a profound responsibility, but if you lean into it, teaching will become the most rewarding job you've ever done.

The meaningfulness of your work will never be in question. Many jobs are alienating, tedious, and there is no easy way to tell if your job matters. With teaching, the stakes blare into your ears every day. You are teaching children to read the world well. You are warning them against egoism. You might be the only adult they have ever met who can dissuade them from a life of inertia, hedonism, and conformity. If you are negligent, you could spiritually maim them. That is the profundity of your responsibility as a teacher. Good! You want to do something that actually matters. Here it is. Bon chance.

You'll be surprised by how much you like it. Where else will you get paid to talk about books? You'll fight every day against the great tide of human apathy, and on many days you'll succumb to it. These days will be failures, and you should feel them as such, but don't wallow in guilt. Never forget that it is your job to show the students what it looks like to care about something even when nobody else does.

Appendix I

Sample Physical Document and Artifact

Faculty Observation Form

Observer: ▮▮▮▮

Teacher: ▮▮▮▮

Date: 3/16/2022

Subject: Math

Observation Type: (Walk-through) Formative

Observation Length: 10 min

Strengths:	Suggestions:
· Classroom was orderly · Students were energetic and engaged · Good use of the whiteboard · Students are in the habit of talking through problems while they work. · Good choral responses · Use of specific praise ☺ · Good balance of practice and discussion. · Purposefully created situation for students to be more articulate "Draw a line in the middle."	· Always speak about numbers in terms of place value. 68 is not just sixty-eight; it is 6 tens and 8 ones. 28 −15 13 ① I identify digits in the ones' place. ② Subract 5 ones from 8 ones = 3 ones ③ Identify digits in tens place. ④ 2 tens minus 1 ten equals 1 ten. ⑤ 1 ten and 3 ones makes 13 ⑥ 28 − 15 = 13 (No need to draw line. - only allow

Further Comments: that for students who really st...

. It is evident that you have articulated and practiced procedures with your students.

· Your students could articulate well the process you taught them to perform the algorithm, but do they know why?

Let's get together and just talk about math.

If you would like to have a follow-up conversation, please let me know. I am happy to chat with you.
Please log into ▮▮▮ and check off receipt of feedback for this observation.

Version 2.14.22

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Appendix J

Permission to use Figure 1

Re: [EXTERNAL] Fw: research on Maslow

Fisher, Molly <███████████>
Thu 2/8/2024 8:48 AM
To:Stone, Matthew Thomas ███████

You don't often get email from fishermolly@rowan.edu. Learn why this is important

Congratulation, Dr. Stone! This is fabulous news. I look forward to reading your work at some point!

Also, glad you found me at Rowan. I took a new position here as an Associate Dean last summer.

Molly H. Fisher, Ph.D.
Professor and Associate Dean of Research and Innovation

College of Education
Rowan University

From: Stone, Matthew Thomas ███████████
Date: Thursday, February 8, 2024 at 6:57 AM
To: Fisher, Molly <████████████
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: research on Maslow

Good morning Dr. Fisher,
I hope all is well with you. I have successfully defended my dissertation and look forward to
sharing with you soon.
I wanted to confirm I have your permission to publish the diagram/image of Maslow's pyramid
applied to teachers. This will of course be cited and credited to you. Thank you.

-Matt

From: Stone, Matthew Thomas <██████████████
Sent: Thursday, February 8, 2024 6:54 AM
To: ██████████████
Subject: Re: research on Maslow

Good morning Dr. Fisher,
I hope all is well with you. I have successfully defended my dissertation and look forward to
sharing with you soon.
I wanted to confirm I have your permission to publish the diagram/image of Maslow's pyramid
applied to teachers. This will of course be cited and credited to you. Thank you.

-Matt

From: Stone, Matthew Thomas
Sent: Tuesday, April 11, 2023 10:14 AM
To: r████████████████
Subject: research on Maslow