

# Questioning the Research on Early Career Teacher Attrition and Retention

Lee Schaefer, Julie S. Long, D. Jean Clandinin

University of Alberta

*In this paper, we consider scholarly work on early career teacher attrition, and retention, from 1999 to 2010. Much of the literature has framed attrition as either a problem associated with individual factors (e.g., burnout), or a problem associated with contextual factors (e.g., support and salary). Some recent conceptualizations consider early career teacher attrition as an identity-making process that involves a complex negotiation between individual and contextual factors. On the basis of our review, we suggest the need to shift the conversation from one focused only on retaining teachers, toward a conversation about sustaining teachers. This shift offers the possibility of new insights about teacher education and about the kinds of spaces needed on school landscapes to sustain and retain beginning teachers.*

*Cet article porte sur les travaux académiques évoquant l'attrition et la rétention des enseignants en début de carrière entre 1999 et 2010. Une part importante de la littérature présente l'attrition comme un problème associé à des facteurs individuels (par ex. épuisement professionnel) ou bien à des facteurs contextuels (par ex. appui et salaire). Selon certaines conceptualisations récentes, l'attrition d'enseignants en début de carrière serait un processus de formation identitaire impliquant des négociations complexes entre l'individu et des facteurs contextuels. À partir de notre analyse, nous évoquons le besoin de s'éloigner des conversations portant exclusivement sur le besoin de retenir les enseignants pour discuter plutôt de soutien aux enseignants. D'un tel changement peuvent découler de nouvelles idées sur la formation des enseignants et le type de milieux scolaires nécessaires pour appuyer et retenir les enseignants en début de carrière.*

## Framing the Problem

While there is some discrepancy about the actual percentage of early career teachers who leave teaching in their first five years (from 5% to 50%), researchers Guarino, Santibañez, and Daley (2006) state “one very stable finding is that attrition is high for young teachers” (p. 10). In the United States, over two billion dollars are spent each year replacing teachers who leave the profession (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). While not only the result of early career teacher attrition, early leavers make up a significant number of teachers who leave teaching. The cost of early career teacher attrition is not only economic. The revolving door of frequent newcomers and leavers creates a non-cohesive environment that can be a major inhibitor to school efficiency in promoting student development and attainment (Macdonald, 1999). Researchers report that the *best and the brightest* among the newcomers appear to be those most likely to leave (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), an important finding when “there is a growing

consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor in determining a student's performance is the quality of his or her teachers" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005, p. 1). We do not intend to imply that early career teacher attrition is a problem in all countries around the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). However, it is a concern in the United States, Britain, Australia, and in Alberta, a Canadian province.

One could frame research into teacher attrition by thinking about the reasons teachers give for leaving teaching such as salary or family commitments. One might also attend to the social dimensions of attrition, for example, thinking about how school culture protects against, or contributes to, the loss of teachers. One could also look at attrition by examining who leaves teaching and when they leave, for example, by considering personal characteristics or demographics.

In this paper, we begin by examining two well-established conceptualizations of early career teacher attrition:

1. In addressing the first conceptualization, we describe the research that positions attrition as a problem related to individual factors of burnout, resilience, personal demographics, and personal factors (such as family).
2. From the second well-established conceptualization, we describe the research around attrition as it relates to the contextual factors of support, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of the context, student issues, and teacher education.

After summarizing the research on attrition as it relates to both individual and contextual factors, we problematize these two conceptualizations by examining promising recent conceptualizations that attend to early career teacher attrition as a process that is negotiated over time. We have grouped these conceptualizations into the following sections:

1. Teacher intentions,
2. Interactions between individual and contextual factors,
3. Integrated cultures, and
4. Challenging "one size fits all."

We link these promising conceptualizations to a process of identity-making in the final section of the paper. This allows us to reconsider the notion of retaining teachers and to begin to attend to what might sustain teachers in their careers.

### **Defining the Terms**

As we began this task we realized there were multiple terms used in the research literature around early career teacher attrition and retention. For example, the *National Center for Educational Statistics* (NCES), in the United States, adopted the following categories and definitions: (a) *stayers* who remain in the same school from one year to the next, (b) *movers* who leave their classrooms for another, and (c) *leavers* who leave classroom teaching. Early career teacher attrition is defined as those who leave teaching in the first five years of teaching.

Freedman and Appleman (2009), in their study of beginning teachers, added a new category, *drifters*, for those who leave urban education but who stay in the field of education. Olsen and Anderson (2007) found in their study of teacher intentions that teachers could be arranged in three groups: (a) *stayers*, (b) *uncertains* (still teaching but not sure if they would stay), and (c) *leavers* (staying in the field of education but leaving the classroom). The Freedman and Appleman (2009) category of *drifters* would fit into the Olsen and Anderson (2007) category of leavers.

As is made clear in these examples from the literature, the definitions are somewhat mixed, which makes doing a meta-analysis of the literature difficult. It is also not always clear in the literature what is meant by "leaving teaching." Sometimes teachers are defined as having left classroom teaching but remain in some form of educational work. Further, it is not always clear what happens when teachers leave states, provinces, or countries. They are usually counted as leavers, however, they may still be teaching but in a different state, provincial, or national context.

### Methodology

We worked with I. Scott in the Coutts Library, University of Alberta, to undertake an extensive literature review for this study. Using terms identified in key review articles (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001), we used the following key terms for our search: New teacher\* or novice teacher\* or beginning teacher\* or early career teacher\*, attrition or retention, or teacher socialization or teacher identity; teacher migration or teacher mobility or movers or leavers.

The key terms were always combined with the idea of new teacher\* (identified in the first search line). We limited our search to articles that were (a) peer reviewed/scholarly, (b) published from 1999 to 2010, and (c) written in English. Databases searched were CBCA Education (Canadian Education Index), ProQuest Education, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Education Research Complete.

The search terms that were used in Education Research Complete were:

- \*TEACHERS -- Recruiting
- \*EMPLOYEE retention
- \*TEACHERS -- Workload
- \*STUDENTS -- Attitudes
- \*QUALITY of work life
- \*JOB satisfaction
- \*TEACHERS -- Supply & demand

The following search terms were used: beginning teachers, novice teacher, early career teacher, teacher recruitment, teacher mobility, teacher collaboration, teaching (occupation), faculty mobility, administrator responsibility, teacher persistence, movers, instructional leadership, socialization, teacher leavers, work environment, teacher identity, career change, job satisfaction, teacher attrition, teacher retention, teacher competencies, quality of working life, teacher supply and demand, career choice, teacher attitudes, teaching conditions, and labor turnover.

The articles that were found were put into REF Works. The research team reviewed all abstracts for the articles and selected 65 peer-reviewed articles that were most pertinent to the problem of early career teacher attrition and retention. We selected articles that were based on empirical studies, regardless of methodology. We read and wrote summaries of these articles. We summarized the articles using the following headings: (a) theoretical frame, (b) research problem, (c) context and subject matter, (d) methodology, and (e) findings. Much of the research we analyzed was based in the United States. We were surprised that more research on the problem of early career teacher attrition was not undertaken in Canada, given that the teacher attrition rates in some provinces, such as Alberta, are very high. We hope that our work in the area creates awareness as well as starting points for other researchers concerned about early career teacher attrition in Canada and in other countries. Due to the redundancy of listing all of the studies conducted in the United States, we only list the country the work was done in if the research was undertaken outside of the United States.

Using an inductive process, we identified that the articles framed the problem of teacher attrition in two ways: (a) those that focused early career teacher attrition as a problem mainly situated within the individual, and (b) those that focused on early career teacher attrition as a problem mainly situated within the context. This allowed us to sort most of the articles into two groups. We then identified articles for a third group, those with nascent framings of teacher attrition, and retention, such as articles focused around intentions, interactions between individual and contextual factors, integrated professional cultures, and reconsidering "one size fits all" induction and mentoring programs.

### **Conceptualizations of Teacher Attrition/Retention**

There have been a number of meta-analyses of the research examining the problem of teacher attrition and retention since 1999. As noted, much of the research appears to identify the issue of early career teacher attrition as either a problem associated with individual factors or a problem associated with contextual or landscape factors. Using these two categories as a guide, we first summarize the literature that adopted a primary focus on individual factors and then the literature with a primary focus on contextual factors.

#### **Individual Factors**

In this section, we identify four overarching factors. Each of these factors, (a) burnout, (b) resilience, (c) demographic features, and (d) family characteristics, situated the problem of early career teacher attrition as mainly within the individual. While contextual factors are seen as interacting with the individual factors, the inquiry starting point in these studies was focused on the individual.

**Burnout.** Maslach (1978, 1982), a leader in burnout research, defined professional burnout as a syndrome of bodily and mental exhaustion, in which the worker becomes negative towards those they work with, and develops a negative sense of self worth. A study conducted by Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) noted that burnout may occur more commonly in teaching due to the isolation and alienation that occurs in the profession. Excessive paperwork, lack of administrative support, role conflict, and unclear expectations also contribute to the burnout of teachers. In Schlichte et al.'s study with beginning special educators, they found that positive mentoring can help to alleviate beginning teacher burnout. Along with positive mentoring they

also found that administrators who are aware of the many stressors beginning teachers encounter may help combat beginning teacher burnout.

**Resilience.** When teachers are referred to as being resilient it points toward their ability to cope with stressors that may impact them as teachers. In the beginning teacher attrition literature, resiliency and commitment, are terms often associated with one another. Freedman and Appleman (2009), in their study with beginning teachers in urban schools, found that beginning teachers who stayed in the profession (stayers) had a disposition for hard work. These stayers were also characterized as being persistent. Gehrke and McCoy's (2007) study on sustaining beginning special education teachers found that beginning teachers who were committed to being resourceful were more successful. Other researchers found that teachers who were committed to the profession of teaching in general were more likely to stay in the profession (Haun & Martin, 2004). In framing the problem of beginning teacher attrition in this individualistic way, there is a suggestion that beginning teachers who leave the profession (a) are not resilient, (b) are not resourceful enough, or (c) are not committed enough to stay in the profession. Thus, those that leave are often seen as having deficits, or as being deficit.

**Personal demographic features (age, sex, ethnicity/race, etc.).** The beginning teacher attrition literature points to personal demographics as playing a role in whether or not an individual stays in, or leaves, teaching. When speaking about beginning teachers there is an assumption that beginning teachers are younger than more experienced teachers. While this is not always the case, as beginning teachers may be individuals who start teaching later in life, a number of United States and international studies showed that younger teachers are more likely to leave in their first five years (Billingsley, 2004; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Macdonald, 1999). Ingersoll (2001) noted that the "relative odds of young teachers departing are 171% higher than for middle-aged teachers" (p. 518).

Ethnicity and gender also play a role in beginning teacher attrition. Studies that attended to ethnicity/race (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006) found that Caucasian teachers are more likely to leave the profession. Macdonald (1999), in her international review, also found that ethnicity plays a role in beginning teacher attrition. Other studies that attended to gender found that females leave the profession of teaching more often than males (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006).

**Personal factors (family).** While the variety of reasons given for why beginning teachers leave the profession are diverse, research often focuses on aspects that are directly related to teaching. The personal landscapes that teachers live on outside of schools also play a role in beginning teacher attrition. "Personal reasons, such as departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves, are more often reported as reasons for turnover than either retirement or staffing actions" (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 522). Decisions to leave the profession may also be attributed to personal finances or perceived opportunities outside of teaching (Billingsley, 2004). Living conditions and family responsibilities are also factors that may play a role in beginning teacher attrition (Macdonald, 1999). Borman and Dowling (2008) noted that teacher attrition might be caused by any number of personal factors that may change across a lifespan.

In summary, studies which foregrounded individual factors highlighted a number of characteristics or features that are located within the individual, such as (a) burnout (exhaustion), (b) resilience, (c) age, (d) race, (e) gender, and (f) ethnicity or family make-up.

## Contextual Factors

In this section, we summarize seven factors that were situated in the contexts in which beginning teachers worked. The (a) support of those on the professional landscape, (b) salary, (c) the availability of appropriate professional development, (d) collaboration, (e) the nature of context, (f) student issues, and (g) teacher education were all factors in studies with an inquiry starting point outside the individual. While the contexts of teacher education, professional development, salary, and student issues interacted with individual factors, the focus of inquiry, in these studies, is on the contextual factors.

**Support of those on the landscape.** Lack of support on the professional landscape is an area often discussed when beginning teachers leave the profession of teaching. Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, and Cowan-Hathcock (2007) conducted a study that utilized a cross-sectional instrument to survey third-year teachers who had participated in induction programs. They found that (a) mentoring by experienced teachers, (b) release time for observing (both same field and variant field), (c) common planning times, and (d) creating networks of new and experienced teachers was found to help support beginning teachers better cope with entry into the profession.

Andrews, Gilbert, and Martin (2007) also found, in their study, that opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers were highly valued by beginning teachers. However, a low percentage of teachers surveyed said this type of support was offered. This study also points to the discrepancies that may be apparent between what beginning teachers perceive as support and what administrators perceive as support. The focus here is on the contextual factors rather than on what the individual beginning teacher might see as support.

Support for new teachers is generally associated with retention. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found that the beginning teachers who were involved with integrated professional cultures (that encouraged collegial and collaborative relationships for all teachers) were (a) more satisfied with their jobs, (b) more likely to stay in the public education system, and (c) more likely to stay at the same school. In a Canadian study of beginning teachers, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) found that (a) support from experienced colleagues, and (b) having a principal who supported a collaborative school culture mitigated some of the challenges faced by beginning teachers. In Angelle's (2006) study of new middle school teachers, the role of the principal in creating a culture focused on students was central to beginning teachers' intentions to stay in the profession. In a study by Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg, and Kamii (2006), beginning teachers saw learning with, and from, others as central to their professional growth. Guarino et al. (2006) found, in their review of the literature, that (a) mentoring and induction programs (collegial support), and (b) more administrative support were associated with higher rates of retention of beginning teachers.

Yet the notion of establishing a culture of collaboration is problematic. Subject matter is one way to consider the complexities of collaboration. Banville and Rikard (2009), based on their study, call for multiple sources of support for physical education specialist teachers because of the circumstances of their professional practice (e.g., involvement in extracurricular activities). One might also think of mentoring as an opportunity for collaboration. In their study of nine beginning teachers in small urban schools, Carter and Keiler (2009) found that the beginning teachers valued the opportunity to know their colleagues and administrators well, but that they had little curriculum support from administrators and haphazard mentorship experiences. Bullough and Draper (2004) explored the mentoring triad between intern teacher, university

facilitator, and cooperating teacher. The researchers described the complexity of mentoring and questioned the portrayal of all mentoring as being good mentoring. Professional development sessions or orientations might also be considered a form of support. Gerke and McCoy (2006), in their study of special education teachers, found that the beginning teachers valued support that focused on problems of practice but were frustrated by *one size fits all* support such as district orientations.

**Salary.** Higher salary is often held up as a solution to beginning teacher attrition. Guarino et al. (2006) found that higher salary was associated with higher rates of retention in the United States. Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff (2008) explored beginning English teachers' attrition and found that only salary was statistically significantly related to increased odds of beginning English teachers' leaving the profession; those who earned less than \$20,000 were more than eight times more likely to leave teaching. Imazeki (2005), looking at teacher mobility and salary, noted that transfers were found to respond most strongly when district salaries were increased relative to nearby districts. The study also found that salary increases for more experienced teachers might also reduce exit attrition among newer female teachers. Inman and Marlow (2004) examined the conditions that kept teachers in the profession. They found that, of the external factors on their survey, beginning teachers identified only salary as a reason to stay in the profession.

As with other contextual factors, there are difficulties with seeing salary as an isolated factor in teacher attrition and retention. Buchanan (2009), in his Australian study, examined the reasons given by ex-teachers for leaving the profession. For some participants, salary was an important contributing factor that caused them to leave the profession. For others, salary was not a contributing factor. Even more broadly, Guarino et al. (2006) suggested that teachers look at overall compensation (comprising salary, benefits, working conditions, other rewards) in relation to alternative employment opportunities.

**Professional development.** There is little research that focuses specifically on professional development with respect to beginning teacher attrition and retention, as professional development is often part of the research on induction, mentoring, and/or collaboration with colleagues. In one study about teacher mobility, researchers examined the teachers' reasons to stay in or leave a school. Elfers, Plecki, and Knapp (2006) found that support for professional learning through incentives and access to resources was particularly important in retaining teachers in schools with high rates of poverty.

**Collaboration.** Teaching in schools involves working with colleagues and administrators. Collaboration among professionals can be a rewarding experience that influences the classroom. A lack of collaboration is one reason that beginning teachers give for leaving the profession (Scherff, 2008).

There may be an absence of collaboration for a variety of reasons. Kardos and Johnson (2007) explored how new teachers in four states experienced their work and their colleagues. They found that, in general, new teachers were solo practitioners. Many beginning teachers worked in cultures where collaborative work was not supported and where they felt they could not, or should not, ask for help from others.

The type of collaboration that happens in schools also varies. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) followed the career decisions of a diverse group of beginning teachers. The researchers distinguished between three types of professional culture: (a) veteran-oriented, (b) novice-oriented, and (c) integrated. They found that beginning teachers were more likely to stay in teaching and be satisfied with their jobs if they were part of an integrated professional culture

that encouraged all members to collaborate in a collegial atmosphere.

In addition to professional culture, other factors such as proximity to other teachers, the positioning of collaborative members, and the responsibilities of the group also affect collaboration. Griffin et al. (2009) explored the factors that support and constrain the work of first-year special educators. They found that beginning special educators who saw themselves as successful collaborators were more likely teaching in, or near, a general education classroom. Bullough and Draper (2004) investigated a mentorship triad of a teaching intern, university supervisor, and mentor teacher. How the participants positioned themselves and the others in the triad affected what collaboration was possible. Haun and Martin (2004) administered a collaboration survey to beginning teachers and teachers who had left the profession with less than five years of teaching. Teachers were more likely to stay in the profession if they were part of a collaborative group responsible for a common group of students and if the collaborative group positively influenced their desire to continue teaching.

**Nature of the context (high rates of poverty, rural, urban, suburban).** The demographic features of schools are also associated with varying degrees of attrition and retention. In his examination of data from the School And Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), Ingersoll (2001) found that teacher turnover in urban, public schools with high rates of poverty was slightly higher than average and that the rate of turnover in small private schools was very high. Much of the turnover in the small private schools could be linked to low salary. Similarly in their review of the literature, Guarino et al. (2006) found that urban and private schools had higher rates of attrition than other schools.

Some recent studies have given further attention to these contextual demographic features. Carter and Keiler (2009) investigated the realities experienced by beginning teachers in small urban schools. They identified a rift between teachers' experiences and the tenets of the Small Schools' urban reform movement. Elfers et al. (2006) looked at teacher mobility patterns. They noted that the geographic location of a school was one factor in teachers' decisions to stay or move.

More generally, Billingsley (2004) has described work environment as one of the themes in the literature around special educator attrition. Teachers who perceived the school as a good place to work were more likely to stay in the profession. The factors shaping school climate are myriad and cannot be limited to simple demographic characterizations.

**Student issues.** Beginning teachers' experiences with students are often seen as one factor that influences beginning teacher attrition and retention. In most studies, this factor involves issues around classroom management.

Borman and Dowling (2008) and Guarino et al. (2006) noted that schools with a higher proportion of students from minority groups and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) had higher rates of attrition. Elfers et al. (2006) found that attrition was related to student poverty; teachers are more likely to leave when schools are located in high poverty areas. Macdonald (1999), in her review, noted that student violence was associated with higher teacher attrition. Patterson, Roehrig, and Luft (2003) also found that student issues were a factor in teachers' reasons for leaving.

One study on Manitoba French immersion programs (Ewart, 2009) showed that, while the overall attrition rates of beginning teachers was very low, the most common challenge was classroom management and evaluation of students. In another Canadian study, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) found that (a) special needs (i.e., meeting students' special needs, and individual education plans), and (b) classroom management/behaviour issues had an effect on



the contextual challenges beginning teachers face in Ontario.

Brown and Wynn (2007), in their study, pointed out that higher levels of teacher retention have consistently been found in schools with fewer student discipline problems. Brown and Wynn (2007, 2009) found that schools grounded in philosophies such as, *it's all about the kids*, had lower levels of teacher attrition. Haun and Martin (2004) noted that beginning teachers who were part of a collaborative team focused on a common group of students were also more likely to continue in teaching. In Johnson and Birkeland's (2003) study, the participating beginning teachers (movers, leavers, and stayers) spoke of their desire to feel successful in the classroom. Overall success for the beginning teachers meant relationship building, a sense that students were learning, and being valued as teachers.

**Teacher education.** Not surprisingly, when teacher attrition problems are discussed in the literature, the structures, philosophies and practical applications of teacher education programs are often addressed. Duck's (2007) study inquired into foundations classes offered in a particular education program and found that increasing the practicality of foundations courses may facilitate a smoother transition in to teaching for beginning teachers. He also found that a focus on self-awareness allows beginning teachers to better understand why they like or dislike certain things and why they respond the way they do to certain experiences. This focus on self-awareness enabled beginning teachers to understand there are a multiplicity of right answers about how to be a "good" teacher.

Alkins et al. (2006), from their study, suggested the need for more support from institutions of higher education for beginning teachers in three categories: (a) instruction theory and practice, (b) establishing a culture for learning, and (c) teacher development/transformation.

Ewart (2009), in a study of new teachers in minority French and French immersion programs in Manitoba, found a very high retention rate and identified one of the factors for this high rate was the pre-service teacher education program which was closely aligned with the school practices where they would be hired. Fantilli and McDougall (2009), in their Ontario study, found that graduates indicated supports that would have mitigated the challenges they faced included pre-service programs with more exposure to practical tasks. Kutcy and Schulz (2006), in their study of Canadian teachers, found that beginning teachers' frustrations included, among other factors, their frustrations with their pre-service programs. The authors noted the need for "collaborative resonance" between teacher education programs and schools.

In the Flores and Day (2006) study of Portuguese teachers, beginning teachers noted tensions between (a) theory (what they learned at university), and (b) practice (the complex realities of the classroom). Flores (2006) suggests that collaboration between the universities and schools is needed to enhance the potential of both institutions.

Freedman and Appleman (2008, 2009) followed a cohort of beginning teachers who had studied in a multicultural urban secondary English teacher education program for five years. They recorded a lower attrition rate and found the factors that contributed to this were (a) the cohort model in teacher education which provided ongoing support as they began to teach, (b) a match between teacher education students' values and ideals with the program, and (c) preparation for the micro politics in urban teaching settings. At the end of the 5-year study, the beginning teachers communicated that one reason for staying was their substantive preparation that included the practical, the academic, and harmony between the two. The teachers also felt the training that helped them to take a reflective stance was helpful.

Hunter Quartz and the TEP Research Group (2003) found, in their follow-up to the graduates of the UCLA Urban Teacher Education Program (TEP), that the teacher education

preparation was important in preparing the beginning teachers with understandings of how to build on the strengths of the urban communities. They found the program preparation was very important in contributing to low teacher attrition rates because graduates saw themselves as becoming change agents and saw themselves as joining a profession. Justice and Espinoza (2007), from their study, found that allowing beginning teachers to become aware of the emotional skills needed to be a teacher might keep them in the profession longer.

Lovett and Davey (2009), in their New Zealand study, questioned the need for a *one size fits all* approach to teacher preparation. Schlichte et al. (2005), in their study with beginning special education teachers, noted the importance of teacher educators creating spaces in their classes to allow student teachers to collaborate and cooperate with one another.

In summary, studies, which focused on contextual factors that influenced early career teacher attrition, highlighted, for the most part, various aspects of contexts without attention to the individual factors. Looking at beginning teacher attrition in this way gives precedence to contextual factors without attention to the unique features of the individual.

### **Promising Recent Conceptualizations**

In our review of the research on beginning teacher attrition we came to see that prior research seemed to focus on providing correct answers, quick fixes, and de-contextualized data. In our view, there was little more that could be learned by de-contextualizing the data in this way. Existing research presents narrow views of the trends and tendencies that are apparent in beginning teacher attrition. Often times, the research focuses on the individual characteristics of teachers without taking into account the contextual factors that may be at play. Other times, the individual factors are dismissed, and contextual factors are studied. Separating contextual factors and individual factors provides insights into either the professional, or the personal, landscape. Furthermore, in the literature we reviewed, beginning teacher attrition has been characterized as a particular event; something that happened at one moment or time. Few studies conceptualize early career teacher attrition as a process that is negotiated over time. In what follows, we outline studies that we believe provide promising new directions for early career teacher attrition research.

### **Teacher Intentions**

Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009), in their Canadian study, discussed the possibilities of conceptualizing teacher attrition as a process. Their metaphor of teachers standing at a bus stop waiting for their bus to come by and take them away to a new place, offers a way to think about the intentions of beginning teachers. This metaphor illuminates the notion that the process of attrition begins long before teachers leave the profession. Those that leave are often weighing their options of how they might leave the field of education. Other researchers are beginning to explore beginning teachers' intentions (Olsen, 2008; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Smethem, 2007). Smethem, as well as Olsen and Anderson, in their British study, found that beginning teachers' intentions to stay in or leave the profession varied when examined prior to teaching or at different points in the first five years. Olsen (2008) looked at beginning teachers' careers in a temporal manner by inquiring into their personal and professional histories to decipher if reasons for entry linked to their intentions to stay in, or leave, teaching. Although these studies

were not able to follow the participants to see if they actually stayed in the profession, it is interesting to consider how beginning teachers' intentions, as they enter teaching, may shape their decisions to leave. Understanding that beginning teachers enter with varied imagined stories of teaching, as well as varied intentions, allows us to be attentive to the notion that not all beginning teachers require the same things, or want the same things. Some may enter with intentions of teaching to retirement, while others may enter to save enough income to travel the world. An awareness of these intentions on both teacher education landscapes and school landscapes shifts the way we think about beginning teachers.

### **Interactions Between Individual and Contextual Factors**

Rinke (2008), in an analysis of the research literature, spoke to the dichotomy apparent in beginning teacher attrition literature between locating the problem of attrition within individuals (e.g., individualized conceptions such as burnout) or within contexts (e.g., contextual conceptions such as support). Even though these areas have a close relational interaction, they are, at times, treated as separate. Rinke called for future research that inquires into both contextual conceptualizations and individual conceptualizations in a simultaneous way. Flores and Day (2006), in their Portuguese study, noted that the complex negotiation of identity includes both individual and contextual factors. Although studying individual and contextual conceptualizations in a separate way may be easier, it does not frame the problem in a way that takes beginning teachers' whole lives in all their complexities into account. Discounting personal lives, and failing to study the personal lives of beginning teachers, because they are messy and immeasurable will continue to leave important data uncovered.

### **Integrated Cultures**

Johnson and Birkeland's (2003) study looked at the types of cultures that can be created in schools and how they might shape beginning teachers' decisions to stay in the profession. They identified three types of professional cultures: (a) veteran-oriented, (b) novice-oriented, and (c) integrated. An integrated culture is "organized to engage teachers of all experience levels in collegial and collaborative efforts" (p. 605). They found that teachers involved in the integrated culture were more satisfied with their jobs, were more likely to stay in the school system, and more likely to stay at the same school. Thinking about integrated cultures and how beginning teacher identities may be shaped in a relational and collegial way also could have implications for mentorship and induction. We wonder how beginning teachers are positioned on their professional landscapes as they enter their first teaching positions. Based on our review, the literature seems to position them as having a deficit. They need induction and mentorship to teach them what they do not know. Thinking about beginning teachers in this way does not take their past experiences into account, and discounts their personal practical knowledge. Thinking about beginning teachers' knowledge as important allows for a shift. It allows beginning teachers to be seen (a) as knowledge holders, (b) as contributing members, and, perhaps, (c) as individuals from whom others can learn.

## Challenging ‘One Size Fits All’

More recent research, in the United States and New Zealand, cautions against the *one size fits all* type of teacher education, mentorship, and induction programs (Bieler & Thomas, 2009; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Lovett & Davey, 2009). Induction and mentorship programs are often seen as a way to *fix* the problem of attrition. However, if the purpose of induction and mentorship is simply to retain teachers, to keep teachers teaching, how does this define induction and mentorship roles? How the problem of induction is defined shapes the nature and duration of support offered and the programmatic tools and resources provided. Beginning teachers need mentors that value the knowledge and past experiences they bring to the professional landscape. They also need mentors who are skilled in helping them learn in, and from, practice. Induction policies need to focus attention equally on new teachers and on their mentors (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

## Shifting the Conversation

In much of the research on early career teacher attrition, the focus on individual factors and contextual factors has directed attention toward the *why* of leaving. In this generalized view, the experiences of the people involved may be stripped away, in the hopes of revealing a general solution to the perceived problem. The proposed solutions address individual or contextual factors in order to retain early career teachers.

The discourse around teacher attrition and retention has kept the focus on seeing the problem as one of only retaining teachers, rather than sustaining beginning teachers in a profession where they will feel fulfilled and see themselves as making a strong contribution. In recent work in Canada and the United States (Clandinin et al., 2009; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Nieto, 2003; Young et al., 2010), there are studies of what keeps teachers teaching or what sustains them. When we consider beginning teachers, we see possibility in adopting this discourse as a more promising way to understand not only what retains, but also what sustains, teachers in teaching.

Much of the earlier research focused on learning a new role rather than an identity. One line of research focuses on the need to understand the process of becoming a teacher as processes of identity-making. Early work in this area began from a view of learning a new identity, that is, an identity as teacher rather than learner. This view was reflected in the early work of Lortie (1975) and has been picked up again in relation to the problem of early career teacher attrition. McNally, Blake, and Reid (2009), from their study in Scotland, discussed identity negotiation as well, and pointed to the importance of being attentive to how beginning teachers’ identities are negotiated within the relational dimensions of the school. Often times these relational dimensions were situated within informal spaces; these informal spaces were important to identity negotiation and daily teaching life (Lovett & Davey, 2009; McNally et al., 2009).

Flores and Day (2006) have begun to study beginning teachers from this theoretical standpoint. Flores (2006) spoke to the challenges beginning teachers faced as they re-framed their identities within the cultures of their new school setting. Flores and Day (2006), in their study of teachers in Portugal, worked from a notion of identities as an ongoing and dynamic process that entails the making sense of, and reinterpretation of, one’s own values and experiences. They identified three main shaping forces: (a) prior influences, (b) initial teacher training, and (c) school contexts.

Clandinin et al. (2009) made a more explicit shift to considering the negotiation of identities over time, and on personal and professional landscapes. They worked from a narrative view of teacher identity as *stories to live by* which links teacher knowledge and contexts. In their work with the stories of teachers in Canada who had left teaching, they suggested teachers' stories to live by gradually shifted until they found they were no longer able to sustain who they were, and were becoming, on school landscapes. These shifts in their stories to live by were negotiated on both personal and professional landscapes.

Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) adopted this discourse in a Canadian study of two beginning teachers in order to try to understand what sustained them in their first year of teaching. In their study they found that their participants' personal and professional landscapes were inseparable when thinking about how they might be sustained. They also found that beginning teachers' imagined stories, those stories of who they would be as teachers, strongly shaped their sustaining experiences on both their personal and professional landscape. Estola (2003) explored the place of hope in how student teachers in Finland constructed their teacher identities. Estola found, as did Schaefer and Clandinin (2011), that there is negotiation between personal and professional identities. Both Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) and Estola (2003) worked from a view of teacher identity as a narrative process. This work on teacher identities offers a great deal of promise to ways we might come to understand beginning teacher attrition as a life-making process. Adopting such a view would offer insight into the life/career span of a teacher, with the temporal process of becoming a teacher as linked with the processes of leaving teaching.

We suggest the need to shift the conversation from one focused only on retaining teachers toward a conversation about sustaining teachers throughout their careers. Working alongside beginning teachers and working from a narrative conceptualization of identity and school contexts offers a promising way to understand what sustains beginning teachers, and, in this way, may offer the possibility of new insights about teacher education and about the kinds of continuing spaces needed on school landscapes to sustain and retain beginning teachers.

### Acknowledgement

This literature review was funded through a grant from Alberta Education.

### References

- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2005, August). *Teacher attrition: A costly loss to the nation and to the states*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/TeacherAttrition.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/TeacherAttrition.pdf)
- Algozzine, B., Gretes, J., Queen, A., J., & Cowan-Hathcock, M. (2007). Beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction program experiences. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 80(3), 137-143.
- Alkins, K., Banks-Santilli, L., Elliott, P., Guttenberg, N., & Kamii, M. (2006). Project QUEST: A journey of discovery with beginning teachers in urban schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 39(1), 65-80.
- Andrews, S. P., Gilbert, L. S., & Martin, E. P. (2007). The first years of teaching: Disparities in perceptions of support. *Action in Teacher Education*, 28(4), 4-13.

- Angelle, P. S. (2006). Instructional leadership and monitoring: Increasing teacher intent to stay through socialization. (National Association of Secondary School Principals). *NASSP Bulletin*, 90(4), 318-335.
- Banville, D., & Rikard, L. G. (2009). Teacher induction: Implications for physical education teacher development and retention. *Quest: Advancing Kinesiology in Higher Education*, 61(2), 237-256.
- Bieler, D., & Thomas, A. B. (2009). Finding freedom in dialectic inquiry: New teachers' responses to silencing. *Teachers College Record*, 111(4), 1030-1064.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2004). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the research literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 38(1), 39-56. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ693730). Retrieved from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Web site: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ693730.pdf>
- Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(3), 367-409. Retrieved from [http://edu.haifa.ac.il/userfiles/file/lead\\_files/ma\\_articles/Borman%20teacher%20attrition%20Rev%20of%20Ed%20Res%202008.pdf](http://edu.haifa.ac.il/userfiles/file/lead_files/ma_articles/Borman%20teacher%20attrition%20Rev%20of%20Ed%20Res%202008.pdf)
- Brown, K. M., & Wynn, S. R. (2007). Teacher retention issues: How some principals are supporting and keeping new teachers. *Journal of School Leadership*, 17(6) 664-698.
- Brown, K. M., & Wynn, S. R. (2009). Finding, supporting, and keeping: The role of the principal in teacher retention issues. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8(1), 37-63.
- Buchanan, J. (2009). Where are they now? Ex-teachers tell their life work stories. *Issues in Educational Research*, 19(1), 1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.iier.org.au/iier19/buchanan.pdf>
- Bullough, R. V., Jr., & Draper, R. (2004). Making sense of a failed triad: Mentors, university supervisors, and positioning theory. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(5), 407-420.
- Carter, J. H., & Keiler, L. S. (2009). Alternatively certified teachers in urban small schools: Where policy reform meets the road. *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, 41(5), 437-460.
- Carver, C. L., & Feiman-Nemser, S. (2009). Using policy to improve teacher induction: Critical elements and missing pieces. *Educational Policy*, 23(2), 295-328.
- Clandinin, D. J., Downey, C. A., & Huber, J. (2009). Attending to changing landscapes: Shaping the interwoven identities of teachers and teacher educators. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(2), 141-154.
- Duck, L. (2007). Using sounder foundations to help avoid the "why new teachers cry" phenomenon. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(1), 29-36.
- Elfers, A. M., Plecki, M. L., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). Teacher mobility: Looking more closely at "the movers" within a state system. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(3), 94-127.
- Estola, E. (2003). Hope as work: Student teachers constructing their narrative identities. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 47(2), 181-203.
- Ewart, G. (2009). Retention of new teachers in minority French and French immersion programs in Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 32(3), 473-507. Retrieved from the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Web site: <http://www.csse-scee.ca/CJE/Articles/FullText/CJE32-3/CJE32-3-Ewart.pdf>
- Fantilli, R. D., & McDougall, D. E. (2009). A study of novice teachers: Challenges and supports in the first years. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(6), 814-825.
- Flores, M. A. (2006). Being a novice teacher in two different settings: Struggles, continuities, and discontinuities. *Teachers College Record*, 108(10), 2021-2052.
- Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), 219-232.
- Freedman, S. W., & Appleman, D. (2008). "What else would I be doing?": Teacher identity and teacher retention in urban schools. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 109-126. Retrieved from <http://gse.berkeley.edu/faculty/swfreedman/WhatElseWouldIBeDoing.pdf>

- Freedman, S. W., & Appleman, D. (2009). "In it for the long haul": How teacher education can contribute to teacher retention in high-poverty, urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(3), 323-337.
- Gehrke, R. S., & McCoy, K. (2007). Sustaining and retaining beginning special educators: It takes a village. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(4), 490-500. Retrieved from [http://www.monarchcenter.org/pdfs/sustaingehrke\\_07.pdf](http://www.monarchcenter.org/pdfs/sustaingehrke_07.pdf)
- Griffin, C. C., Kilgore, K. L., Winn, J. A., Otis-Wilborn, A., Hou, W., & Garvan, C. W. (2009). First-year special educators: The influence of school and classroom context factors on their accomplishments and problems. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 32(1), 45-63.
- Guarino, C. M., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(2), 173-208. Retrieved from <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/105033642/Teacher-Recruitment-and-Retention--A-Review-of-the-Recent-Emperical-Literature>
- Hahs-Vaughn, D., & Scherff, L. (2008). Beginning English teacher attrition, mobility, and retention. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 77(1), 21-54.
- Haun, D. D., & Martin, B. N. (2004). Attrition of beginning teachers and the factors of collaboration and school setting. *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education*, 27(2), 1-7. Retrieved from [http://www.amle.org/portals/o/pdf/publications/RMLE/rmle\\_vol27\\_no2\\_article3.pdf](http://www.amle.org/portals/o/pdf/publications/RMLE/rmle_vol27_no2_article3.pdf)
- Hunter Quartz, K., & TEP Research Group. (2003). "Too angry to leave": Supporting new teachers' commitment to transform urban schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(2), 99-111.
- Imazeki, J. (2005). Teacher salaries and teacher attrition. *Economics of Education Review*, 24(4), 431-449. Retrieved from <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~jimazeki/papers/EERAugust2005.pdf>
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/rmi/TeacherTurnoverTeacherShortages-RMI-Fall-2001.pdf>
- Inman, D., & Marlow, L. (2004). Teacher retention: Why do beginning teachers remain in the profession? *Education*, 124(4), 605-614. Retrieved from <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/55426423/Teacher-retention-why-do-beginning-teachers-remain-in-the-profession>
- Johnson, S. M., & Birkeland, S. E. (2003). Pursuing a "sense of success": New teachers explain their career decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 581-617. Retrieved from [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/Johnson-Birkeland\\_AERjournal\\_Fal03.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/Johnson-Birkeland_AERjournal_Fal03.pdf)
- Justice, M., & Espinoza, S. (2007). Emotional intelligence and beginning teacher candidates. *Education*, 127(4), 456-461. Retrieved from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3673/is\\_4\\_127/ai\\_n29358571/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3673/is_4_127/ai_n29358571/)
- Kardos, S. M., & Johnson, S. M. (2007). On their own and presumed expert: New teachers' experience with their colleagues. *Teachers College Record*, 109(9), 2083-2106.
- Kutcy, C. E. B., & Schulz, R. (2006). Why are beginning teachers frustrated with the teaching profession? *McGill Journal of Education*, 41(1), 77-89. Retrieved from <http://mje.mcgill.ca/index.php/MJE/article/view/510/421>
- Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lovett, S., & Davey, R. (2009). Being a secondary English teacher in New Zealand: Complex realities in the first 18 months. *Professional Development in Education*, 35(4), 547-566.
- Macdonald, D. (1999). Teacher attrition: A review of literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(8), 835-848.
- Maslach, C. (1978). Job burnout: How people cope. *Public Welfare*, 36(2), 56-58.
- Maslach, C. (1982). *Burnout, the cost of caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- McNally, J., Blake, A., & Reid, A. (2009). The informal learning of new teachers in school. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 21(4), 322-333.
- Nelson, C., Antayá-Moore, D., Badley, K., & Coleman, W. (2010). The sustaining possibilities of service-learning engagements. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 353-371.

- Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Olsen, B. (2008). How reasons for entry into the profession illuminate teacher identity development. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 23-40. Retrieved from [http://www.teqjournal.org/TEQ%20Website/Back%20Issues/Volume%2035/VOL35%20PDFS/35\\_3/07olsen-35\\_3.pdf](http://www.teqjournal.org/TEQ%20Website/Back%20Issues/Volume%2035/VOL35%20PDFS/35_3/07olsen-35_3.pdf)
- Olsen, B., & Anderson, L. (2007). Courses of action: A qualitative investigation into urban teacher retention and career development. *Urban Education*, 42(1), 5-29.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2005). *Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_39263231\\_34991988\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3746,en_2649_39263231_34991988_1_1_1_1,00.html)
- Patterson, N. C., Roehrig, G. H., & Luft, J. A. (2003). Running the treadmill: Explorations of beginning high school science teacher turnover in Arizona. *High School Journal*, 86(4), 14-22.
- Rinke, C. R. (2008). Understanding teachers' careers: Linking professional life to professional path. *Educational Research Review*, 3(1), 1-13.
- Schaefer, L., & Clandinin, D. J. (2011). Stories of sustaining: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of two beginning teachers. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 4(2), 275-295. Retrieved from <http://www.learninglandscapes.ca/images/documents/ll-no8-final-lr.pdf>
- Scherff, L. (2008). Disavowed: The stories of two novice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(5), 1317-1332.
- Schlichte, J., Yssel, N., & Merbler, J. (2005). Pathways to burnout: Case studies in teacher isolation and alienation. *Preventing School Failure*, 50(1), 35-40.
- Smethem, L. (2007). Retention and intention in teaching careers: Will the new generation stay? *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and practice*, 13(5), 465-480.
- Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3), 681-714.
- Young, M., Chester, J.-L., Flett, B. M., Foe, L., Marshall, L., Moore, D., et al. (2010). Becoming 'real' Aboriginal teachers: Attending to intergenerational narrative reverberations and responsibilities. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 285-305.

---

*Lee Schaefer* is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Alberta studying in the area of Secondary Education. Lee's interest in early career teacher attrition stems from his own experiences as a beginning teacher. Using narrative inquiry as a method has provided opportunities to see how much is at work as beginning teachers compose their lives on both their personal and professional landscapes.

*Julie S. Long* is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and an affiliated faculty member at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta. Her research interests include narrative inquiry, teacher attrition and retention, and mathematics education.

*D. Jean Clandinin* is Professor and Director, Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta. A former teacher, counselor, and psychologist, she co-authored with F. Michael Connelly, several books including *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000). Jean edited the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (2007).