



#StayinTeaching: Pathways to Writing Project Leadership for Early-Career Teachers

Northwest Arkansas Writing Project

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Abstract

In the United States, 30-40% of teachers leave the profession during their first five years. This includes the exit of promising teachers, many who have been identified as exemplary, but who have come to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, or under-appreciated. Research suggests that excellent teachers who stay in the profession had experiences during their novice years that contributed to their retention. These include: mentoring and collaboration, belonging to professional communities, self-initiated growth plans, and connections with external networks of teachers. These reasons for staying in the profession align well with the experiences of participation in Writing Project activities. We are vexed by concerns about lost potential when promising teachers make an early exit from the career, and we feel certain that being involved with Writing Project leadership could curtail this exit. A combination of online surveys, face-to-face focus groups, and summer retreats helped us identify what our Writing Project site has provided that has been helpful and also helped us find our blind spots – those things that have kept novice teachers from participating. This monograph describes our plan for cultivating young teacher-leaders and the journey we took to develop that plan. By sharing our process and outcomes, we hope to support other Sites in their desires to involve promising young teachers in ways that will curb their exit from the profession. Because the path to leadership that we've developed for early-career teachers involves incremental steps rather than commitment to a month-long institute, Sites might also find our ideas helpful as they consider alternative pathways to leadership for the various teacher-groups they serve.

Introduction

Why This Work?

Writing Project site leaders and teacher consultants of the Northwest Arkansas Writing Project have become increasingly alarmed by the number of early-career teachers who are choosing to leave the profession. Teacher consultants describe talented peers who become overwhelmed or frustrated and leave the teaching ranks, even after having invested extensive time and money in obtaining teaching licenses and advanced degrees. This anecdotal evidence is confirmed by research. Although not as high as once considered, attrition of teachers during their first five years is 30 – 40% nationwide (Perda, 2013; TNPT, 2012). Arkansas’s attrition rate of early career teachers is 35% (Pfeffer & White, 2015). Problems with teacher retention create a shift toward a less-experienced profession (Headden, 2014) and mean that our students face a revolving door of less-experienced teachers.



Our profession is facing a deficit of experienced teachers. As a result, potentially strong teachers never rise to become Writing Project leaders. Early-career teachers are under-represented as TCs, even though they begin with enthusiasm and have been prepared through strong teacher-education programs that emphasize current best-practices. Our TC population needs fresh recruits to remain vibrant and effective!

Recent research identifies some of the factors identified by early-career teachers as reasons for leaving the profession. The generic description of “dissatisfaction with teaching” (Ingersoll & May, 2012) is illuminated by reports of lack of professional support, lack of instructional autonomy, and a recognition that even excellent teachers had rarely been made to feel important (Headden, 2014).

In contrast, excellent teachers who stayed in the profession indicated that, during their novice years, they valued mentoring and collaboration, belonged to professional learning communities, initiated their own professional growth plans, and made connections with external networks of teachers (CGTL, 2014; Gray, Taie, &

The US suffers not from a shortage of qualified teachers but from an inability to keep them in teaching (Lewis & Hurd, 2011, p. 8).

O’Rear, 2015; Headden, 2014). In Arkansas, retention efforts by the state department of education specifically target mentoring and increasing opportunities for teacher leadership (Pfeffer & White, 2015).

It strikes us that the reasons excellent teachers identify for staying in the profession align with benefits of participation in Writing Project activities. Writing Project events can provide opportunities for mentoring and collaboration, support self-initiated professional growth, and extend learning communities beyond the boundaries of schools and districts. However, looking within our ranks, we notice that early-career teachers are minimally represented in our Teacher Consultant network and in the outreach activities supported by our site.

We are vexed by concerns about lost potential when promising teachers make an early exit from the career, and we feel certain that being involved with Writing Project leadership could curtail this exit. The purpose of our project is keep early career teachers in the profession and involve them in writing project leadership.

Why Involve Early-Career Teachers in Writing Project Activities?

National Writing Project leadership activities are transformative and empowering (Dierking & Fox, 2013; Liberman & Wood, 2003; Robbins & Dyer, 2005; Stokes, Hirabayashi, Murray, & Senauke, 2011; Street & Stang, 2009; Whitney, 2008; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013) and impact teachers’ leadership potential (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007; Stanton, McKinney, Meyer, & Friedrich, 2009). Analysis of interviews conducted seven months after our 2014 Invitational Summer Institute demonstrated ongoing increases in teacher understanding and efficacy, changes in teacher practice, improved instruction as evidenced by student performance, and the expanding influence of participants (Collet, 2015). Participants identified strengths that supported these changes, including:

- Teachers had autonomy and agency.
- Opportunities for independent work and collaboration were intertwined.
- Teaching and observing demonstration lessons provided for authentic learning.
- Sharing with others developed leadership.

Significantly, a teacher who participated in the Institute after his second year of teaching said, “Even though I’m a younger teacher, I can still share what I have with others and share what I’ve learned....I can lead and be a leader without being authoritarian.” This teacher’s comment demonstrates the potential for Writing Project activities to impact early-career teachers. Unfortunately, we are failing to reach excellent and potentially-excellent novice teachers through Writing Project activities. Often, Writing Project sites require several years of teaching experience before participating in the traditional Invitational Summer Institute, and often first-year teachers have weighty required training through their districts that prohibits their participation. We worry that overviews of curriculum documents that districts may provide as

part of new teacher induction lack the characteristics identified above that could sustain and transform novice teachers.

Concerns about early-career teachers became personalized for Northwest Arkansas Writing Project leadership when we got an email from Tyler McBride saying he was considering leaving the profession. Tyler was a graduate of our secondary Masters of Teaching program. Because of his exemplary performance in that program, Tyler had been invited to participate in the Invitational Summer Institute after his second year of teaching. We had been in his classroom and knew him to be an excellent teacher. The thought of a teacher with such potential leaving the profession was painful to us. Not only did we care about Tyler, we cared about the contribution he was making to students and colleagues. We knew about the pressures of testing, evaluation, and constrained curriculum that he was facing, and we wanted to offer support.

Shortly after receiving Tyler’s email, another email landed in our inbox: the request for proposals for the Building New Pathways to Leadership grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The juxtaposition of these two emails helped us see the potential of Writing Project to support early-career teachers and keep them in the profession so they could rise to Writing Project leadership through meaningful involvement with ongoing Writing Project activities.

What Might Meaningful Involvement Look Like?

By building on successes with hybrid models of professional learning and considering the types of support that are most helpful to early career teachers, Writing Project sites can draw additional novice teachers into their networks in ways that encourage teacher retention and longitudinal involvement leading to Writing Project leadership. Opportunities provided by social media and other technology hold promise for engaging and supporting early career teachers.

For example, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat can build networks and communicate professional information. One of our active teacher consultants calls Twitter, “my best professional development tool.” Creating Pinterest boards with specific instructional focuses is another way to harness social media. For example, during recent Invitational Summer Institutes we’ve created boards with mentor texts for argumentative writing. Nationwide, Writing Project sites are including synchronous virtual conferencing and also asynchronous online work as part of Invitational Summer Institutes. Our younger teachers might have much to offer regarding how to harness social media resources.

As we plan for activities that include early-career teachers, we recognize that young teachers may already feel stretched with required district meetings. Our challenge is to involve harried novice teachers in ways that will make their work easier and more fulfilling. We know Writing Project involvement can help teachers focus on the right things, making their work more efficient and effective. We can shift their attention from dealing with classroom disruptions to planning engaging instruction that minimizes such disruptions. We can help them engage with learners instead of overzealously engaging with students’ already-completed papers. But we are mindful

that involving novice teachers in Writing Project activities should not tip what may already be an unbalanced load.

In our work with early-career teachers, we have discovered that online tools can address needs efficiently. But we've found that a face-to-face, personal component is needed as well. Sitting in a circle talking to each other matters. Events that bring early career teachers together make a difference. Also beneficial are opportunities to connect with broader networks. For example, attending the National Writing Project Annual Meeting and the National Council of Teachers of English conference provides purposeful ideas for instructional planning that increases efficacy of early-career teachers and can help to sustain and retain exemplary young teachers.

Through our two-year challenge for designing new pathways to leadership for early career teachers, we have uncovered many ideas for supporting these budding professionals. Trying to find a balance for providing support without feeling like one more thing to do has caused us to wobble (Garcia & O'Donnell-Allen, 2015), but we are willing to sway and occasionally falter as we improve our efforts to help early-career teachers #StayinTeaching and to add their innovation and energy to Writing Project leadership.

CHAPTER ONE

Assessing the Needs of Early-Career Teachers

Two views guided our initial ventures into creating a pathway to Writing Project leadership for early-career (EC) teachers. The first view came from veteran teachers who had survived those early years but had stories to tell. These stories spilled out at our first Building New Pathways Writing Project meeting as leaders from other sites heard about our project. There was the story of dumpster-diving because a teacher was too afraid to ask colleagues for their handouts; the story of crying every day after school; the story of an unlikely mentor in the form of a school janitor, who would rub a teacher's shoulders as she unloaded her woes. The teachers who surfaced these memories emphasized the importance of the work we were planning. "You are doing triage," they said.

But we were also guided by another view: A vision of EC teachers collaborating with other EC teachers and having a support group among themselves to work through problems; a vision of EC teachers with authentic mentors who had thought hard and deep about their own instruction; a vision of EC teachers tapping into the experience and knowledge that our Writing Project site offers. And a vision for EC teachers.

These views guided our work as we began collecting information about the needs of early-career teachers. A combination of online surveys (accessed through a variety of social media), face-to-face focus groups, and two summer retreats helped us uncover root causes for teacher attrition and lay the foundation for our effort to provide pathways to Writing Project leadership for novice teachers. Trial and error with different events has taught us much about being responsive to the needs of early-career teachers as we build and follow our new pathway to Writing Project leadership for early-career teachers, which we called #StayinTeaching.

We recognize that the needs we have uncovered may be unique to our context. Because the needs at other sites will differ, in this manuscript we are also sharing the processes we used to uncover root causes. We hope that sharing our processes and tools might be helpful for other sites in understanding dilemmas at their sites related to early-career teachers. The processes and tools might also be helpful in addressing other design challenges.

The Right Players at the Table

When faced with a challenge, it's important to involve the right people. This means having people who understand the problem and also people who can do something about it – and hopefully there is a big intersection between these two groups. For our problem of creating a leadership pathway for early-career teachers, having the right players at the table made a huge difference in our success. We were thoughtful about the composition of the steering team that would guide this work.

Those Who Understand the Problem

When we initiated our design challenge for #StayinTeaching, one of our teacher-consultants, Tyler McBride (whom you heard about above) was still an early-career teacher (first five years). He had participated in our Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute after his second year of teaching and had been highly-requested and effective as a facilitator and for demonstration lessons.

We also reached out to teachers who had been accepted to the ISI but dropped out because of other commitments. We needed to reconnect with them in a way that would not be burdensome. As part of our #StayinTeaching steering team, these teachers provided personal insight and helped us figure out who else needed to be at the table. They told other early-career teacher friends about our work, and we extended invitations for them to join us on the steering team. Almost every early-career teacher in the new group already knew at least one other person. These relationships helped us hit the ground running.

We wanted to involve as many perspectives as possible and include a wide variety of voices in this process, including those at risk for leaving the profession. So the steering team for our project consisted of nine early-career teachers, including teacher-consultants, a new mom, a teacher moving out of state, and a non-traditional 1st year teacher who had changed professions. The team was a diverse group – it included both elementary and secondary teachers and males and females. Our team also included three experienced educators: a university professor, a district administrator, and a teacher consultant with 15+ years of experience.

Those Who Can Do Something About the Problem

In theory, we want those who are living with a challenge to be empowered to do something about it. However, we recognized that to do so, those facing a challenge might benefit from the support of others. This was especially true with our challenge, because early-career teachers often feel overburdened by their daily classroom responsibilities. Involving veteran teachers who are Writing Project teacher-consultants has been valuable as we have built the #StayinTeaching pathways. Teacher-consultants involved in the work have helped us recognize what our site has provided that has been helpful and also what we didn't know that we didn't know! Recognizing those blind spots has allowed us to more effectively involve early-career teachers, a group that has, in the past, been minimally involved with the Site.

Involvement of a district administrator on our steering team was a risky step, especially since two other members of the initial steering team came from the same district as the administrator. These EC teachers were at first uneasy about sharing their challenges when one of their administrators was present. However, these teachers, and others on the team, later told us how important it was to have a district leader present. As relationships of trust were established, EC teachers did share their stories and said it was important that they felt they were heard by the

administrator. Even though there was leadership from only one district, this was important to all EC teachers. The district leader was able to implement suggestions that impacted many early-career teachers.

Involvement of a university professor, who facilitated the project, was also helpful. Dr Vicki Collet, associate director of Northwest Arkansas Writing Project, filled this niche. Her role was to create a climate and structure discussions so that the team could determine what pathways to leadership might help teachers #StayinTeaching. Once these pathways were designed, she tried to ensure that EC teachers were the visible leaders of the initiative while she carried out behind-the-scenes details that EC teachers might have had difficulty finding the time to manage.

Early-Career Teacher Survey

In our efforts to assess the needs of early-career teachers, we sent an online survey that not only requested information about young teachers' professional development needs but also asked what might motivate their participation in ongoing activities. We wanted to know how to serve them and even pamper them in ways that are professionally meaningful.

Using our university's records of recent graduates we sent our survey to early-career teachers who were our alums. We also sent the survey to our teacher-consultants and asked them to forward it to other early-career teachers.

Eighty-three teachers responded, 45% of whom had just finished their first year of teaching. The survey can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/StayinTeaching>. Teachers highlighted "students" and "light-bulb moments" as perks of their job, but noted that non-teaching responsibilities such as duties, paperwork, testing, and behavior posed difficulties. Responses indicated that those on their teaching team and also their mentors provided support, but mentors also were the most-commonly identified wished-for support. Interestingly, the most common response for "What I wish I'd known" was some variation of "You don't have to be perfect."

What early-career teachers say they wish they'd known:

"You don't have to be perfect!"

The survey provided data about the challenges and desires of early-career teachers, which we shared with the steering team during our first #StayinTeaching retreat.

First Steering Team Retreat

Purpose

The first Summer Retreat for the #StayinTeaching Steering Team was the most important work of the two year project. During this retreat we came to understand the problem more deeply

and generate potential solutions to the problem. At this stage, it was critical that we reflected on root causes, not simply surface problems. This allowed potential solutions that were on target.

The retreat was held in a nearby resort town. For fun, we held it in a reputedly haunted hotel, built in 1886 – that included bats!



The site of our summer retreats.



Hotel staff retrieve a bat.

The setting was actually beautiful, and the retreat atmosphere was conducive to the deep thinking needed. Because we were bringing together teachers from across the region, most of whom had never met, trust-building and community-building were an important part of the foundational layer of this work. Throughout the retreat we worked with different partners, in mixed small-groups, and with the whole group, either sitting on chairs in an open circle or (occasionally) around the conference table.



The summer retreat included protocols for visioning, long-range planning, brainstorming, and problem-solving. The outcome of this event was a plethora of ideas for invigorating our Site by reaching out to early-career teachers.

Planning

In preparation for this important work, the facilitator (Dr. Collet) reflected on past experiences she had had with successful change. She reviewed literature and consulted online resources, particularly the National School Reform website, which includes a repository of protocols that support innovation and change.

Vicki also thought about what would motivate participants – beyond their own desire to improve the profession. To this end, retreat participants received 12 hours of state professional development credit because our work aligned well with our state’s focus areas of mentoring, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change. This credit counted toward teachers’ required PD hours for their district. The team also received a goody bag with fun, inexpensive items for their overnight stay at the hotel. The calming face mask was a hit!



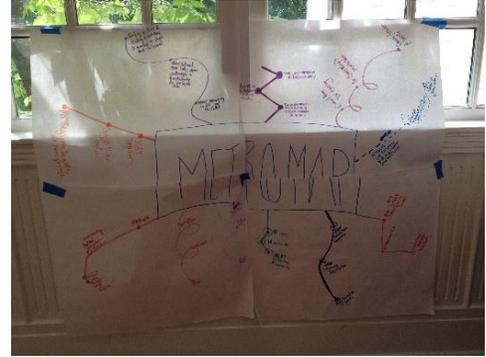
Processes and Protocols for Root-Cause Analysis

Solutions are effective only if they address the root causes of a problem. Because of this, we took a methodical approach to identifying some of the underlying reasons that early-career teachers leave the profession. We were not hasty in suggesting solutions, waiting instead until we felt that we were addressing fundamental issues. Below we describe the careful process that led to solutions for our Site’s early-career teachers. We describe our process in detail, hoping that you might find this description useful in uncovering solutions to problems that vex your own Site – whether or not they are related to early-career teachers.

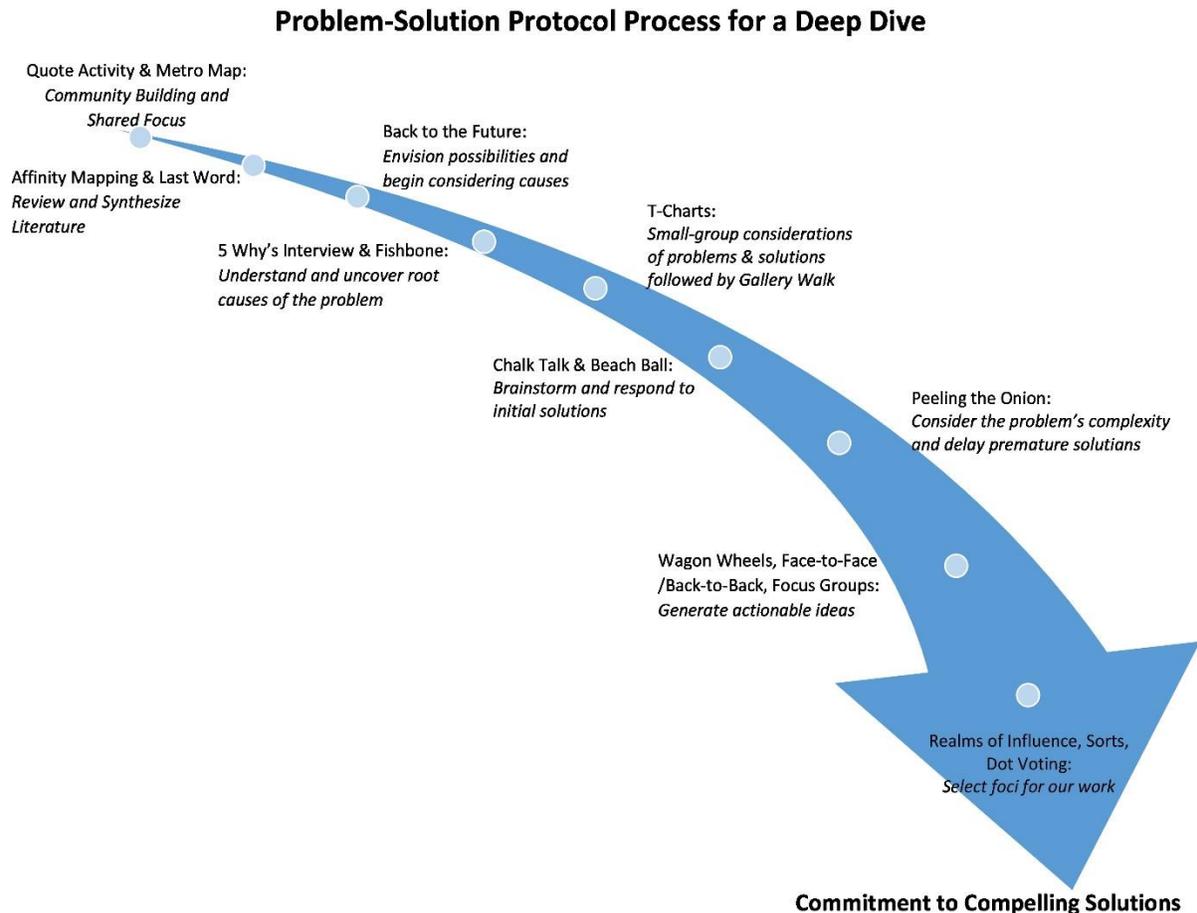
As our #StayinTeaching steering team began its work, our essential questions were:

- How does the exit of early-career teachers impact the profession? How does it impact students’ learning?
- Why do early-career teachers leave the profession?
- What might help early-career teachers stay in teaching?
- How might connections with Writing Project keep early-career teachers in the profession?

To ground the work and begin building relationships and understanding of the unique perspectives each brought to the group, we considered our own paths to the #StayinTeaching retreat using the [Metro Map protocol](#). The map we created is to the right.



An important part of our process was uncovering and understanding root causes of why so many early-career teachers were leaving the profession. After considering our own stories and those of others, including research about teacher attrition, we envisioned more positive, possible futures using the Back to the Future protocol. This protocol also helped us begin to consider causes, a focus that was furthered with the Fishbone and 5 Why's protocols. This series of protocols led us to a deeper understanding of the needs of early-career teachers and a commitment to the compelling solutions that emerged, as shown in the figure below.



An [agenda](#) for the retreat and also a description of the [protocols](#) we used can be found in the appendices.

Initially, our deep dive pushed us to consider causes for teacher attrition, because it's only when we really get to the cause that effective solutions can start to surface. This inquiry climaxed as we combined the Fishbone and 5 Whys protocols.

Dr. Collet used the 5 Why's protocol (described in more detail below) to guide an interview with Tyler McBride. You'll recall that Tyler's email about potentially leaving the profession gave impetus to this initiative. Below is a retelling of the story that surfaced during that interview, in Tyler's own words.

Tyler's Story

I have experience multiple challenges during my first few years of teaching that honestly have made me question whether I wanted to be a teacher. I also faced different challenges at different schools, which I feel gives me a unique perspective on the ways that early-career teachers feel pressured and challenged, sometimes to the point of leaving the profession. However, I also had several great sources of support that helped me through these difficulties. While I was in my student teaching, the movement at the "Big 4" schools in Northwest Arkansas toward standardization and lock-step curriculum mapping was just beginning. While interning in one of these districts, I already began to see how this was putting pressure on teachers to conform, limiting autonomy and innovation.

I had already made up my mind before graduating from the Masters of Arts in Teaching program that I wanted to teach at a smaller school. I ended up in a small district, and I genuinely loved teaching there. I had a great support system of teachers and administrators, and I loved that I had the autonomy to determine my own curriculum, teaching strategies, and methods that I wanted. I did at times, however, wish that I had like-minded teachers to plan with and talk to - most of the teachers at my school, while great people, were fairly traditional in terms of literacy instruction. During the last year of my time there, I encountered my greatest difficulty. There was a change in administration at the district level, which resulted in more top-down directives about what we were to do and how we were to do it. The teachers at my middle school also spent a good portion of the year planning changes to the schedule and layout of the middle school, but then the plan was only partially implemented by the district.

After that year, I moved to Lincoln Middle School. In terms of administration, Lincoln is much more supportive and helpful - both in terms of my professional growth and involvement and my personal life. On that side, my move alleviated a lot of the challenges I had been facing, but the move also created some new challenges. At Lincoln, I am teaching literacy and social studies (as opposed to only literacy), I teach 90-minute block classes (as opposed to 45 minute periods), and the school has a 1-to-1 laptop program (as opposed to occasional access to a laptop cart). Any one of those adjustments by itself would have been difficult, and making all of those changes at once made me feel like I was a first-year teacher all over again. Plus, I had

a difficult group of students to work with - on my first day working in my classroom, a 6th grade teacher told me they would be "trouble." It didn't help that in this new and challenging situation, I let some of the instructional strategies that I knew would be best for students be replaced by some less-than-optimal ones. In short, amidst all of these challenges, I lost sight of what was most important, which probably exacerbated my students' discipline problems and my stress. In addition, many of the staff members at my current school have a tendency (in my mind, an unhealthy tendency) to place a lot of importance on test scores and test prep. At the beginning of the year I was so stressed that I didn't feel up to challenging these notions - or when I did, my voice was lost. During all of this time, I came home many nights and collapsed on my couch, filled with stress about the next day before the current day was even close to being over. Multiple times, I considered leaving teaching entirely and finding something else to do with my life.

I am just now starting to gain back my confidence in my own teaching abilities, after reverting back to some best practices of reading and writing instruction and after renewing some of my own passion. It came to the point where I simply had to remind myself of why I had become a teacher in the first place, and find ways to infuse that back into my day. For example, one of my passions is sparking a love of reading in my students, and one of the things I'm most proud of in my classroom is my classroom library. But this year I had let my student's reading time become drab and routine - instead of sparking their interest and passion, reading was a chore to be completed every day to keep me happy, or a chore to be avoided as much as possible. That's starting to change, and I'm confident it will continue to change. I only regret the time I wasted before I realized what was happening. I'm also starting to regain my own voice at teacher meetings and professional development sessions at LMS. We are redesigning our school for the coming year, and I'm working to make sure my voice is heard to share how I believe literacy instruction should look.

(Tyler's story, which became an article in *English Leadership Quarterly* as a result of his work with the project, can be found [here](#).)

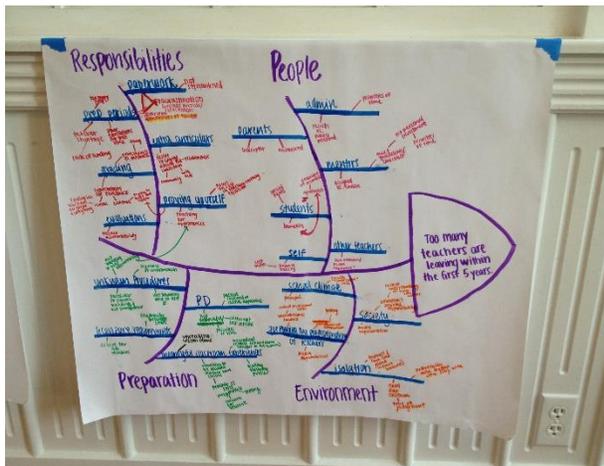
Determining Root Causes

Tyler's personal story provided the backdrop for our work with the the Fishbone protocol, which we combined with 5 Why's. The Fishbone is a structured team process for identifying underlying factors or causes of an event. Fishbones helped us consider lots of alternate causes and sort ideas into useful categories. Working in small groups, we asked:

- What is the problem/effect? During this step, it was important to be clear and specific. We were careful not to define the problem in terms of a solution! Team members wrote this at the head of their fish.

- Next, they considered what might be the major categories of causes of the problem (for example, materials, policy factors, people/staff factors, etc.). They wrote these on the large skeletal bones.
- After this, we brainstormed possible causes for each category. These formed the smaller bones.
- For each cause, we asked, “Why does this happen?” We wrote these sub-causes as branches on the diagram.

Here are two of the charts that were created:



As we worked through the Fishbone protocol, we also repeatedly asked “why.” The 5 Whys protocol ensured deep causal thinking rather than more obvious solutions that get too-easily tagged. Here’s how it works: Someone states what they think is a cause. For example, if I ask someone why they were late for work, they might answer, “I was late for work because I ran out of gas.” Asking, “Why did you run out of gas?” reveals yet another layer to the problem: “I ran out of gas because I didn’t buy any on my way to work.” “Why didn’t you buy any on your way to work?” you might ask. “Because I didn’t have any money!” “Why didn’t you have any money?” “Because I bought these gorgeous shoes last night!” might be the response. “Why?” “Because when I see a gorgeous pair of shoes, I just have to have them even though I already have a closet full of shoes!” Asking “Why?” multiple times revealed that the root cause of being late to work as a shoe fetish! Without the 5 Whys protocol, we would never have known! Of course, 5 is not a magic number. The point is, we need to go deep enough to get at real answers to the question. During our #StayinTeaching retreat, the final “Whys” that each small group developed led to root-cause statements that helped move us beyond surface-level solutions.

Because we understood the problem’s complexity, we didn’t want to jump into solutions that might not address underlying causes. The multiple protocols and activities we went through helped us to peel back the layers of the problem and also to prioritize solutions that were within our realm of influence.



Findings

Importantly, our findings include not only what early-career teachers need, but what they bring to us as a Writing Project Site. Through our inquiry, we recognized that early-career teachers bring energy and enthusiasm and, importantly, that they are informed about current best practice.

We also uncovered three important needs for early-career teachers: professional learning, networking, and mentoring. Although early-career teachers have often just left teacher preparation programs that include a focus on current best practice, they need to understand how to implement these practices in a way that goes beyond lock-step curriculum guides that may be provided by their districts. This professional learning should build upon and extend their learning from their teacher-preparation programs in a meaningful way.

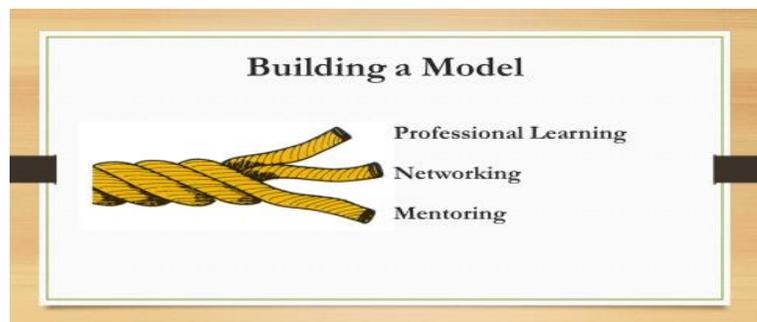
A presentation reporting our findings is [here](#).

Early-career teachers also need networking, both with other EC teachers and with teachers who have had more experience. Networking is not just an information exchange; it involves building relationships that can create a community of colleagues.

Finally, early-career teachers need mentoring, which can grow and extend from networking experiences. Mentoring should be authentic, relationship-based, and not focused on fulfilling mandated, prescriptive requirements.



The great news is that Writing Project is uniquely positioned to provide all of those components. We found that these three needs of EC teachers (Professional Learning, Networking, and Mentoring) could be intertwined in Writing Project events.



At the first #StayinTeaching retreat, we each took ownership for activities that would happen as part of our initiative. We also created a prioritized wish list that considered possibilities for longer timeframes and larger budgets. Because of this, when we received funding for a second year to continue the Pathways work, we had a plan ready to be enacted.

At the end of the #StayinTeaching Steering Team Retreat, teachers were honest about their concerns of the added responsibilities the things we had planned would bring. Through the “Best

Hopes, Worst Fears” protocol, they expressed these concerns. But they were also filled with hope, saying, “Our enthusiasm will change the culture of our schools.” They expressed optimism about reducing the attrition rates of early-career teachers and saw the initiative as an opportunity to “build a strong network, to meet like-minded people, and to provide leadership within their schools.” They had confidence that real change could occur “that will add value to the teaching profession in order to keep the talent we have,” that “Something someone in this room does will keep a great teacher in the profession.” They expressed hope that “ECT’s will be given resources, opportunities, and connections that will help them feel welcome and safe.” These hopes seemed realizable because we had focused our plans on what was real, what could be done, and we had made commitments that “don’t feel too overwhelming.”

“Our enthusiasm will change the culture of our schools.”

The #StayinTeaching initiative supports early-career teachers when they need it most – in their first years of teaching. This promotes application and extension of valuable knowledge gained during teacher preparation. It involves current teacher-consultants in rewarding mentoring opportunities and aren’t our teacher-consultants the kind of mentors we want for EC teachers? The #StayinTeaching Pathway makes Writing Project experiences more available and accessible, not just to EC teachers, but to others as well; for example, rural teachers have participated in our #StayinTeaching virtual events. The #StayinTeaching project defines new pathways to leadership that include EC teachers early and often, providing steps toward leadership by capitalizing on EC teachers’ interests and abilities, involving them in both innovative and traditional Writing Project events. This helps EC teachers gain leadership experience and supports our Writing Project networks as they are revitalized by the energy of these early-career teachers. By involving EC teachers in WP events early and providing small steps along the path to leadership, our New Pathway to Leadership helps EC teachers #StayinTeaching.

Year Two Steering Team Retreat

The second Summer Retreat for the #Stay in Teaching Steering Team was an essential component of the two-year project. Participants continued to generate ideas. These included details for enacting solutions formulated during the first retreat and creating new opportunities to address the target outcomes. Six steering team members returned from the previous year’s work and were joined by seven new recruits.

Purpose

The purpose of this retreat was to reflect on the progress to date with the #StayinTeaching Initiative and determine feasible next steps for implementation to sustain and increase efforts to support early career teachers.

The year two retreat had some similarities to year one including location and some repeated protocols. This retreat was again held in a local resort town at a haunted hotel. The geography

and features of the retreat site provided participants access to an environment where a depth of collaboration and problem solving could occur. Participants from around the region came together. All participants (except the facilitator) were early-career teachers.

The outcomes of this event included reflecting on previous work, building pathways to support early career teachers, and determining ways to undertake the next steps of the initiative.

Planning

The second #StayinTeaching Steering Team Retreat was held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on June 20-21, 2017. Individuals who participated in the retreat again received 12 hours of professional development credit since our efforts aligned with the state's focus areas of leadership, collaboration, systemic change, and mentorship.

Our essential questions were:

- What mentoring, networking, and professional learning practices will support early-career teachers?
- How can we increase participation in events for early-career teachers?
- How can we sustain support for early-career teachers?

What mentoring, networking, and professional learning practices will support early-career teachers?

Several activities from the first-year retreat bore repeating, but we now brought a more refined view of how to support early career teachers. We considered ways to increase participation from early-career teachers, veteran mentors, and administration in order to bring together a variety of perspectives.

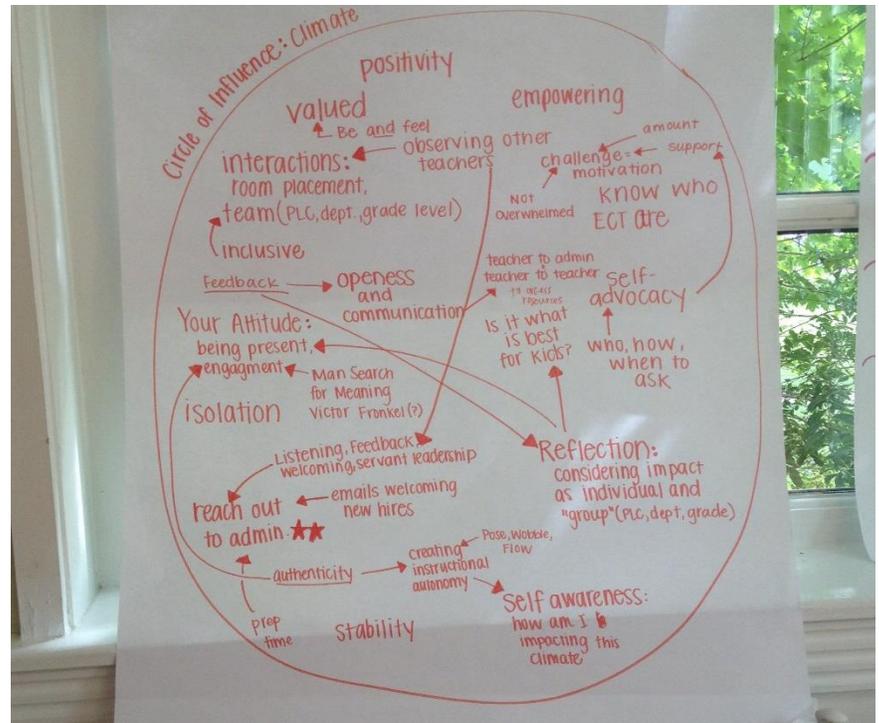
During the retreat, participants reflected on past events, determined new directions, and planned future activities. Significant time was set aside to do the work of planning events that had previously been envisioned.

Perceptions

During the second summer retreat, we added a few important insights to our understanding of the needs of EC teachers. In addition to networking, mentoring, and professional learning, we

focused on the need that EC teachers have for positive school climate and ample resources. Although Writing Project Sites may not be in a position to provide for these needs, we embrace the role of advocacy and recognize our opportunity and obligation to promote this support for early-career teachers.

The need for positive climate and ample resources were evident during the 5 Why's and Interview protocol, particularly as Jean Hill told her story.



Jean's Story (this is a description of what was disclosed during the interview and guided further conversations)

After my first two years I was done. I gave away most of my classroom library and was on my way to permanently leaving the profession.

After my first two years I was done. I gave away most of my classroom library and was on my way to permanently leaving the profession. Even though I just finished a master's degree in education, I knew I could not continue in my current circumstances. I faced many challenges including a lack of physical, emotional, and support resources. I had to hang my own whiteboard to write on in my room and teach in a building that was not safe for myself or my students. I feel like I can clearly understand some of the reasons why teachers leave the profession, especially early-career teachers.

I had begun my teaching career in another state, and it was not until I moved to the Northwest Arkansas area that I gained a refreshed perspective on current education and my role within it. When I realized how supported both students and educators can be in pursuing teaching and learning, I started to reconsider my work in this profession. I spent a year substitute teaching in the region and discovered access to resources including technology, professional learning communities, and administrative mentorship. It was this experience that reinvigorated my desire and drive to stay in the profession a little longer. Without those collaborative experiences, I am not sure I would be talking with you today.

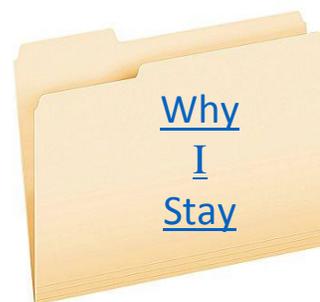
After this year of exploration, I restarted my teaching career at the secondary level. I continue to learn and grow; however, I find myself remaining humble in the learning process. I have been surprised with how I have grown as an educator. It is the collaborative community at my current site and across the region that keeps me going. Although some

challenges continue, I have found new ways to navigate them. Additionally, now that I have new perspectives on the types of access to resources educators and students should have, including but not limited to technology, personalized learning, and professional learning opportunities, I have become a stronger advocate of what I believe needs to happen in schools for teachers and students.

My experiences led me to realize how transformative collaboration and support can be for early-career teachers. I often wonder how different my first- and second-year experiences would have been different if I understood the ways that early-career teachers could be supported through people, advocacy, and resources.

My hope is that by participating in the #StayinTeaching Initiative that fellow early-career educators will not face the same challenges that I did that led me to almost leave the profession.

Another outcome of the second retreat are the “Why I Stay” letters composed by the steering team – including Jean. (and added to by others). We hope these letters (found in the appendix and folder to the right) will inspire other early-career teachers.



Extend & Respond

After reading Chapter One, we hope that you’ll want to learn and do more to help teachers #StayinTeaching. Below are some extensions.

- 1) In addition to the big steps of mentoring, networking and professional learning, we also identified small, personal things that support early-career teachers – things that we can implement, one person at a time if we want to make a difference. These include:
 - A pick-me-up note from a colleague or principal
 - Praise from a peer – it is a little thing that can make a big difference!
 - A quick, thoughtful email – these can be very encouraging.
 - Building relationships among faculty
 - Personal connections – these relationships are HUGE for teacher success.
 - Quick conversations not related to school (so that teachers get to know each other as people, not solely on their educator identity)
 - Genuine concern and an ear when needed.
 - Quick check-ins

Early-career teachers reminded us that small things piled up = big things.

- 2) Participants in several Writing Project events have written “Why I Stay” essays and “Letters to My First-Year Teacher Self” (see examples in the folders above and to the right). Writing and sharing such a letter can be a personal response that lets EC teachers know they are not alone.



CHAPTER TWO

Our Plan

During our first summer retreat, the #StayinTeaching Steering Team identified events that could support early-career teachers and put them on a pathway to Writing Project leadership. As the school year got underway, we began putting the plans into action. Activities included virtual events that were quick, accessible, and used venues EC teachers were predisposed to (like Google Hangouts, Twitter chats, Facebook, podcasts). But we acknowledged the need that had been voiced by EC teachers for face-to-face interactions and included more traditional meetings as well. We also recognized that having our current teacher-consultants invite EC teachers provided networking and mentoring opportunities and encouraged EC teacher participation.

Events for Early-Career Teachers

Based on our findings from the summer retreat, we moved ahead with experiences that would involve early-career teachers in networking, mentoring, and professional learning experiences. The steering team met a few times via Google Hangouts to coordinate our plans, but most of the work we had outlined was taken up by groups of two or three, with a few charging ahead on their own.

The first nine months of the initiative included several “threshold” experiences – opportunities for early-career teachers to get their foot in the door of Writing Project and begin experiencing the NWP social practices. The summer retreat for the steering committee was the first experience, with participants collaborating and responding to others’ ideas. Also during the early stages of the grant, a fall event was held, along with several Google Hangout events. A second round of funding for the Pathways project allowed us to implement the full-range of activities we had envisioned, based on the wish list we created at our first steering team retreat. The table below shows a schedule of events on a new pathway to leadership.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM
	STRv	MARa	STR	RETR	STR		MARs	STR	RETR	STRv	
			EDC		YWC			MENT	MENT	MENT	MENT
			ISI	ISI	ISI	ISI	ISI	WMC			
				BC	BC	BC	BC	KICK			
BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG	BLG
	POD		POD		POD			POD		POD	
		HANG	HANG						HANG	HANG	

Teacher Professional Learning Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write • Go Public with our practice • Learn/Engage the profession 	Abbrev.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate/respond • Lead • Advocate 	
○ EdCamp	EDC
○ Fall Mentoring Kick-Off	KICK
○ Ongoing mentoring activities	MENT
○ Social Media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook)	SM
○ Blog	BLG
○ Google Hangouts	HANG
○ Podcasts	POD
○ Writing Marathon (Synchronous & Asynchronous)	MAR
○ Writing Retreat	RETR
○ Young Writers Camp	YWC
○ *Steering Team Meeting	STR
○ ISI	ISI
○ Writing Matters Conference	WRC
○ Book Club	BC

These included both traditional events, such as our Writing Matters Conference and Writing Marathon, along with new events designed specifically through this initiative, such as Google Hangout events and an online book club. Our agenda was rigorous, allowing us to try a variety of events and consider the benefits and drawbacks of each. Our goal was to create a series of small steps that could provide a pathway to leadership for early-career teachers – a pathway that could include or be independent of the Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) and that would incorporate all of the social practices that are core to the Writing Project and included in the experience traditionally provided by the ISI. The three strands of networking, mentoring, and professional learning that we had identified as needed by early-career teachers were intertwined in this slate of events.

Extend & Respond

After reading Chapter Two, we hope that you'll want to learn and do more to support early-career teachers. Below are some extensions.

- 1) Create an email list of early-career teachers in your school or site. Use this list to share support and opportunities.
- 2) Look at the list of Writing Project activities we've generated on pg. 26. Which of these are you already participating in or providing? How could you extend an invitation to early-career teachers to participate in these activities? Is there a specific teacher who would appreciate *your* invitation?

CHAPTER THREE

Mentoring

Teaching is a complex activity, requiring a long internship of practice to maximize effects on student learning (Nevins Stanulis & Floden, 2009). However, many novice teachers do not make it to this point, leaving the profession because of burnout, lack of support and resources, and inadequate opportunities for professional learning. Mentoring – allowing another to learn from and with you – can help to bridge the gap between entrance into the profession and mastery, reducing teacher attrition and helping novice teachers thrive.

Throughout the #StayinTeaching initiative, opportunities have arisen for informal mentoring. For example, we have encouraged Teacher Consultants to invite novice teachers to Writing Project events. Opportunities for collaboration during these events allowed for unofficial mentoring as veteran teachers worked with less-experienced ones, sharing ideas and offering support. For example, during [Young Writers Camp](#), most sites included a more experienced and a less-experienced teacher as facilitators. Experienced teachers shared their ideas for writing response groups during our [Compose Yourself](#) writing retreat, and teachers of all experience levels problem-solved and learned together during our [#StayinTeaching EdCamp](#). These and other Writing Project activities encouraged the development of informal, supportive relationships, whether short-lived or long-term. However, we also included a more formalized mentoring program as part of the #StayinTeaching initiative.

#StayinTeaching Mentoring Partnerships

Purpose

People learn from observing the behavior and actions of others, and we crave communication and interaction with peers. Teaching, however, can be an isolating profession. Teachers spend most of their time not with peers but with students, and they have little opportunity to observe their peers at work and to plan and problem-solve together. When an early-career and more veteran teacher agree to partner in mentoring work, both have the opportunity for personal and professional growth.

For early-career teachers, having someone to watch and to look to for advice provides reassuring support. Having an authentic, trusting mentoring relationship can be a positive experience that helps EC teachers thrive.

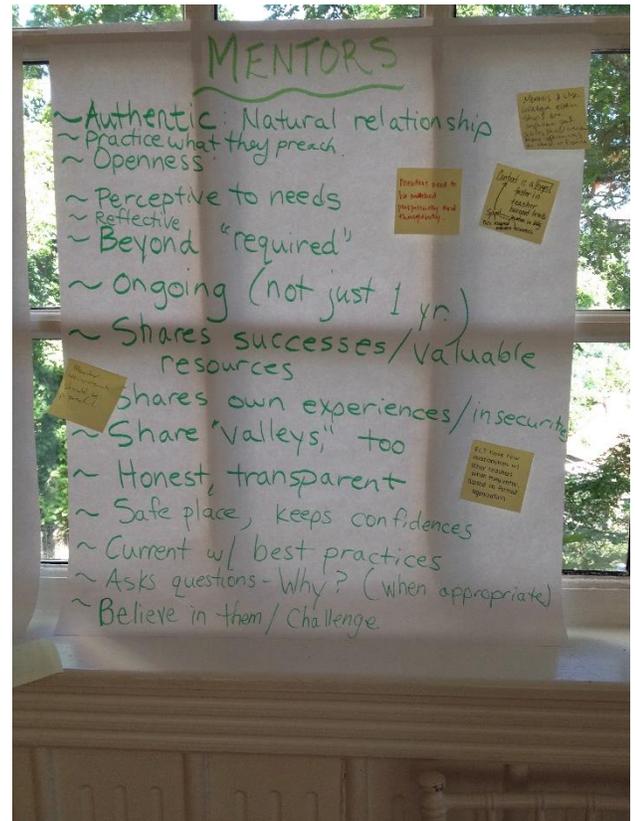
Planning

Insight provided by EC teachers on our steering committee suggested that the assigned mentoring activities required by their districts usually did not offer the mentoring support they desired. Instead, these mentoring relationships felt inauthentic, like another thing on their already-long to-do list. From our discussions and a review of professional literature, we knew it would be important to provide choice in selection of mentors and to encourage activities that created authentic support tailored to the needs of the mentee. We knew mentees would value open, honest, transparent communication. We knew they needed to feel safe and to be confident that confidentiality would be maintained. Further, we knew that trust meant not just confidence in personal aspects of the relationship, but also confidence in the professional knowledge of the mentor. Mentees wanted someone who was current with best practices but also willing to share their own challenges, setbacks, and successes. They wanted someone who believed in them, too, and would challenge them to be their best teacher selves. We wanted to encourage dialogue that would lead to habits of reflection that the mentee would carry with them into the future.

Our teacher-consultants seemed the most likely candidates for the types of mentors we were looking for. However, our steering committee also wondered whether teachers who had recently entered the profession, whose own experiences as first-year teachers were fresh, might also prove to be beneficial as mentors. So we also sought early-career teachers as part of our mentoring cohort. Each mentor would work with a first-year teacher.

Initially, we had planned to provide a stipend to mentors but hoped mentees would see value in the relationship and volunteer to participate. However, as our experience with the #StayinTeaching initiative grew, we recognized the need to incentivize the participation of not only the mentors, but also the mentees in our #StayinTeaching mentoring program. Early-career teachers are so busy that even if they suspect that a different kind of mentoring may be beneficial, they might need another inducement to participate. For this reason, we revised our budget to allow new teachers to receive a stipend. We also offered teaching resources as gifts for mentees.

To recruit mentees, we sent an email to first-year teachers on our EC teacher email list sharing a link where they could apply to the mentoring program. We then sought an equal number of mentors. In addition to reaching out to our teacher-consultants, we contacted early-career teachers who had participated in #StayinTeaching activities and recruited them for this work.



Ultimately, however, only one EC teacher served as a mentor. The others were teacher-consultants for our Writing Project site.

Once we had selected the mentors and mentees for the program, we wanted to give mentees the opportunity to choose the mentor that was right for them. To do so, we asked both [mentors](#) and [mentees](#) to create profiles by completing a Google form. We had these profiles available when we met to kick-off the mentoring program at the conclusion of our 2017 [Fall into Teaching](#) event. Throughout the event, opportunities for informal conversations and interaction during structured protocols gave mentors and mentees the chance to get to know each other. Before asking mentees to choose their mentors, we also did a round of speed dating, with prompts and quick two-minute conversations that ensured each mentor and mentee had met. We then asked mentees to list their first, second, and third choice for mentors, hoping we would be able to match mentees with one of these selections. We wanted the mentorship to be based on natural, not forced, relationships between the first-year teacher and the more-veteran educator. Because our mentors and mentees worked at different schools and much of the mentoring would be done remotely, we felt this face-to-face initial meeting was important for building authentic relationships.

After the kick-off, each mentor and mentee received an email introducing them, connecting them electronically, and sharing expectations for the mentoring program. We wanted teachers to connect in ways that did not feel coerced, so responsibility for building the mentoring relationship rested with each mentor, allowing her the flexibility to meet the needs of her mentee however they deemed appropriate.

Mentors received a weekly email with suggestions for support that might be offered. These suggestions ranged from tips for building trusting relationships and having goal-oriented conversations early in the mentoring cycle to how to listen more actively and encourage self-reflection as the mentoring relationship developed. In addition, all mentors were added to the listserv for a weekly [mentoring and coaching blog](#) written by Dr. Collet. In this way, mentors received two weekly reminders to reach out to their mentees. In addition, a monthly mentoring meeting was held via Google Hangout, with all mentors sharing their progress and struggles and problem-solving together. Content of the [weekly emails and Google Hangouts](#) is included in the appendix.

A mentoring reunion occurred in January, proving an informal, personal closure to the #StayinTeaching mentoring experience. At the reunion, teachers ate dinner and visited informally about their experiences. Then mentors and mentees participated in a “who are the other mentors in your life” activity, meant to ensure an expanding network of support as the official #StayinTeaching mentoring program ended. Mentees also wrote letters to themselves to be opened on the last day of school; they handed these off to their mentors, who had the responsibility of mailing them when the time arrived. In addition, mentors wrote a letter to their mentees, which would be mailed to the mentee in March.

Perceptions

Most of the #StayinTeaching mentoring partnerships were successful; mentors rooted the relationship with their mentees in key values, collaboration, and genuine curiosity. They focused on issues central to their mentees' professional lives. Most mentors reported that the relationships felt natural, not forced, and that the support they provided extended beyond what might be required by assigned mentors as they tried to personalize the support they were providing. Some mentors and mentees observed one another, some had regular phone conversations and texting exchanges or FaceTime or face-to-face meetings. Some exercised together and chatted while they worked out. The variety of approaches taken corresponded to the needs of individual mentees.

Interestingly, the one partnership that felt less successful was the only partnership where a mentee was not assigned her first, second, or third choice for her mentor. This was necessary because of the selections made by mentees; it was possible to fulfill the requests of all mentees except this one. In this relationship, the mentee was mostly unresponsive to attempts by the mentor to provide support. The mentoring relationship was mostly one-way, even though the mentor tried multiple ways of reaching out to her mentee. Although frustrating for the mentor, she still felt she gained insights that helped her in other mentoring and collaborative relationships within her school. This experience emphasizes the importance of authentic relationships and choice in mentoring experiences.

Informal and formalized mentoring activities during the #StayinTeaching initiative encouraged the development of supportive mentoring relationships, both short-lived and longer-term. Interaction and communication with more-experienced peers fostered supporting relationships to help EC teachers #StayinTeaching.

Extend & Respond

After reading Chapter Three, we hope that you'll want to learn and do more to help teachers #StayinTeaching. Below are some extensions.

- 1) Review the [books and articles about mentoring](#) list in the appendix. Choose one and read it. Consider an early-career teacher you know as you read.
- 2) Invite an early-career teacher to sit by you during your next professional development experience. Share your own insights throughout the day.
- 3) Offer to let an early-career teacher observe in your classroom during your planning period. Even if she teaches a different grade-level or academic area, you will both learn if you make time to talk afterward and approach that time with a spirit of inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR

Online Professional Learning

Our investigation of root causes for teacher attrition emphasized EC teachers' need for networking, mentoring, and professional learning. We found that these three needs could be intertwined in Writing Project events, so we created events that targeted early-career teachers. These included virtual events that were quick, accessible, and used venues EC teachers were predisposed to, like Google Hangouts, Twitter chats, Facebook, and podcasts.

Google Hangouts

Purpose

#StayinTeaching Google Hangouts are opportunities for **networking** and **professional learning** for early career teachers. They provide an interactive platform for small groups of early-career teachers to meet virtually. Virtual meetings have the benefits of utilizing technology that may be familiar to early-career teachers who are used to accessing information online and communicating with others through virtual platforms. Virtual meetings are also accessible to teachers in rural settings; anyone, anywhere can join our #StayinTeaching Google Hangouts, as long as they have an internet connection. Additionally, no time is lost in travelling to an event. This is important since time is the resource many early-career teachers feel is most lacking in their professional lives.

Using this technology initially as a professional development platform allowed us to think about different ways of convening groups of teachers for other purposes as well. After our team gained familiarity with this tool, we began using it to for planning and coordinating between our team members. For the same reasons that it is advantageous for use in professional development, it became useful for us to coordinate our work without the need for as many face-to-face meetings.

Planning

Before starting this work, most of our facilitators had limited experience using Google Hangouts. We found that the best way to familiarize ourselves with the platform was to dig in and try out new ideas as we went along. Below, we've provided some logistical information about using Google Hangouts as well as a basic outline of what happened during our sessions.

Using Google Hangouts

- Google Hangouts is a video communication app similar to FaceTime. The facilitator or participants also have the ability to share their screen. Google Hangouts also has a

chatting option, so a “side conversation” can occur simultaneously with video communication.

- Google Hangouts can be used in conjunction with other apps. For example, an agenda might be created in Google Drive and shared with participants, who add comments during the meeting. Google Hangouts can also be used simultaneously with presentation software (such as Google Slides or PowerPoint) so that the facilitator can easily share links, writing prompts, and other information with participants.
- Consider when to hold your Hangouts. Our participants suggest that soon after school gets out might be best. This could vary depending on your audience. Others have suggested a weekend evening. The best time will depend on your context and your intended audience.
- Publicizing your event is key to reaching your audience. Consider what social media you have in place to share registration information. Teachers usually connect frequently with email during the school year, so this can also be an effective means of sharing information.
- Google Hangouts are limited to ten participants (this is an attribute of the app). If more than ten people register, the Hangout can be offered multiple times or multiple facilitators can support the event at the same time. Facilitators send a link to participants, who use the link to join the conversation. The small group size supports networking opportunities.
- Because of these size limits of Google Hangouts, registration is necessary. Creating a registration system allows you to ensure a space for everyone. We’ve used Google forms for registration (here’s an [example](#) from one of our registrations).
- Information about the Google Hangouts App is available at <https://support.google.com/a/answer/4362302?hl=en>. In addition to being familiar with this information as facilitators, it’s helpful to send this information in advance to participants so that they can familiarize themselves with the app if they haven’t used it yet.
- These links provide additional information that we found useful in learning to use and planning Google Hangouts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul6CADXyb2s>; <http://elearningindustry.com/6-tips-use-google-hangouts-for-synchronous-learning>

Google Hangouts Sessions

School's Out

Our first attempt at using Google Hangouts as professional development was a “School’s Out” event in the summer of 2016. The purpose was to give participants a chance to celebrate and reflect on the end of the school year, and the event was hosted by Tyler McBride.

First, we watched a teacher appreciation video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIKT-KuAek>), noting a phrase that stood out as we watched and discussing our reactions with the group. Then, given a short time to write, we reflected on a quote from Steve Jobs, who said:

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it.”

Next we watched another video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miPYLJI247g>) and shared our thoughts with the group. To conclude the event, we invited teachers to write a letter to their first-day teacher self and add it here:

<http://tinyurl.com/LettertoFirstDayTeacherSelf>

We invite you to do the same.

School's In

The School’s In event followed an agenda and included activities similar to our School’s Out hangout. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for early-career teachers to connect, reflect, and feel energized early in the school year. Because we were still building our database of teachers to reach out to and attendance at the previous Hangout had been low, we felt we could appropriately repeat the event and take advantage of the work we had already done.

Lighten Your Load

This event was a time to identify less-effective, time-consuming practices in writing instruction that teachers could toss away guilt-free! Vicki Collet, associate director of our Site and professor of curriculum and instruction, shared research about practices that DO NOT WORK (such as grammar worksheets, looking up words in the dictionary, etc.) and should be let go of. This collaborative event used content from the keynote at our recent Fall event. We were looking for ways to lighten our own load as well, while providing professional learning experiences to a wider

audience. So we repeated the content on a different platform to a different audience. Retasking kept the initiative manageable.

Networking & Collaboration

We held this event twice, in March & May of 2017, to allow for a broader base of teachers to participate. We started with this writing prompt:

Think of a transformative or “ah-ha” moment you had at some point in your teaching, however large or small. What happened? What led you to your “ah-ha” moment? What changed about your practice after that?

Then, we introduced ourselves to each other and introduced the session topic. In a shared Google Doc, we spent a few minutes brainstorming and listing the ways that we network or connect with other educators. Using Google Docs at this point was useful because all participants were able to type in the same document at once, including some participants whose devices did not allow them to connect to the session through video.

Then, we discussed the advantages and constraints of participating in professional networking in these various ways, and we each shared a success story we had while networking or collaborating with other educators. We closed by explaining some of the opportunities within our Writing Project site and having each participant share a takeaway from our conversation.

Additional Ideas for Google Hangouts

We had several ideas for additional Google Hangouts (listed below) that we thought would be valuable ways to engage early career teachers through a virtual platform, but were not able to implement because of our time constraints.

- Q & A with veteran teacher
- Professional book sharing - giving participants opportunities to share their favorite professional books
- Guest speakers (professionals, authors, educators, administrators, etc.)
- Pose questions to participants beforehand, to provide food for thought that supports the conversation during the Hangout

Perceptions

While we eventually found Google Hangouts to be a useful platform for multiple purposes, our experiences using it were not without challenges. During our first Google Hangout (the “School’s Out” session in summer 2016), had low participation and those who did join in had difficulty connecting and using the platform. But, as Tyler mentioned after this hangout, “There are no failures, only learning experiences.” Later forays into this medium were more successful, partially because these events provided a low-stakes entry point for participation in our

Writing Project site. In multiple instances, we were able to include teachers who would not otherwise have been able to participate in Writing Project events because of difficulty finding childcare or traveling long distances.

In the same way that the stakes and cost were low for teacher participants, the stakes and cost were low for our site and facilitators as well, since the platform is free to use and the length of each hangout was less than one hour. Even when not as many teachers joined a session as we would have liked, our facilitators were able to engage with those who did participate on an individual level. The video format of these sessions allowed us to engage with each other in a more personal way than communicating with text through email or Twitter, for example.

Using Google Hangouts also provided another opportunity for leadership among the steering team members. Tyler and Yvette, both participants in our first Summer Retreat, took lead roles in facilitating Google Hangout sessions. This experience gave Yvette, who has not participated in a traditional summer institute, the opportunity to demonstrate her leadership ability and find a place in Writing Project events.

Book Club

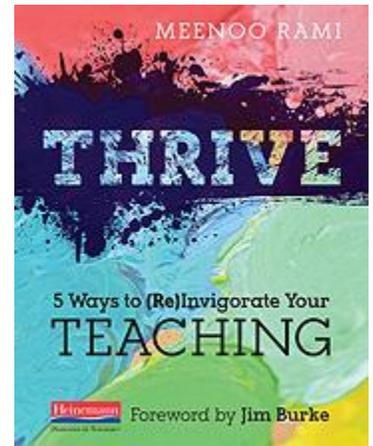
Purpose

The book club fit within two of the strands that we identified as essential to the #StayinTeaching paradigm: professional learning and networking. First, the book club enabled early-career teachers to learn and reflect about relevant topics for enriching their professional lives. Additionally, participants benefitted from online and face-to-face discussions of the book. Through these discussions, participants could build, maintain, or strengthen connections to professional learning networks. When early-career teachers have opportunities for both professional learning and networking, they will likely feel more connected to the teaching community, intellectually challenged, competent, and valued, all of which are key factors to retaining early-career teachers in the profession.

Planning

Our online book club for early-career teachers was a one-time event, taking place over the span of 6 weeks. The book club was kicked off with a face-to-face meeting at our “[Fall Into Teaching](#)” event. Book club meeting dates had been determined by distributing a survey to steering team participants and other EC teachers in our area. Based on survey results, the book club facilitator determined the best month for the book club to meet (virtually and face-to-face). This was to ensure the highest participation.

We provided a free copy of the book [Thrive: 5 Ways to \(Re\)Invigorate Your Teaching](#) by National Writing Project teacher consultant Meeno Rami to each book club participant. This particular text was chosen by the #StayinTeaching steering team because of its relevance to EC teachers and its close alignment to the #StayinTeaching paradigm. Specifically, the text discusses the following suggestions for “reinvigorating” teaching: turning to mentors, joining and building networks, keeping work intellectually stimulating, listening to oneself, and finally, empowering students.



Following the organizational meeting at the Fall into Teaching event, the first five book club meetings took place via an online discussion platform (Blackboard). Each week, participants discussed an assigned section of the book by responding to the facilitator’s prompt, sharing their personal reactions, and building off of each other’s ideas. The primary reason for choosing an online discussion platform was so that participants could have more flexibility and time to respond.

For the sixth and final meeting, participants met at a local coffee shop to discuss their overall takeaways and applications from the book. This final face-to-face meeting was another way for participants to continue strengthening their personal and professional learning networks. The facilitator felt that the final face-to-face meeting was essential for achieving one of the book club’s objectives: networking.

Perceptions

In reflection, conducting the book club online may not have been the best decision. Though EC teachers oftentimes use the internet and social media for networking, the face-to-face meeting garnered more participation overall. In general, though, those that participated online were more likely to attend the face-to-face discussion. Several participants at the face-to-face meeting noted that they valued the professional networking opportunity that the book club provided. Some even made plans to meet in the future. Interestingly, at the face-to-face meeting, many of the ideas in the book were manifested. Participants shared resources, ideas, and tips. Overall, the book club was a good way for EC teachers to learn and to network, but perhaps face-to-face meetings would be the most effective way to conduct meetings.

Podcasts

Purpose

When we started the #StayinTeaching work, we already knew that early-career teachers were busy. Our time thinking and talking together at the Summer Retreat in June 2016 confirmed that feeling overwhelmed is one major stressor in many EC teachers' lives. Many EC teachers juggle the requirements of their teaching lives (lesson planning, meetings, grading, communicating with parents, and classroom management, for instance) while also trying to meet the demands of their relatively new adult lives (such as buying or renting a home, paying bills, commuting, dealing with car or home repairs, adjusting to married life, or even having a new baby at home). Many EC teachers simply don't have the desire or energy to give up what precious downtime they might have to attend a professional learning or social event on an evening or a Saturday.

Our discovery of high-quality, engaging podcasts like NPR's Hidden Brain and TED Radio Hour made us realize the potential for podcasts to provoke deep thought that could spark writing and discussion. Additionally, the platform allows for anyone to listen at their leisure, whether while working on household chores, commuting, or relaxing before bed. No one has to adjust their schedule or travel to listen to a podcast - they just press play and listen. Also, similar to reading an article or watching a video online, podcasts provide opportunities for response, either by commenting on the podcast itself or by engaging with the creators and other listeners through social media platforms.

We were hardly the first educators to imagine using podcasts as a way to connect teachers or reinvent professional learning. However, the idea of podcasting did spark our thinking: How could we use podcasts to highlight and share the quality work of teachers (especially EC teachers) in our network? How could we use podcasts as a supplement to the inquiry and learning experiences already happening at our site? And, how could podcasts help bring more voices into our work?

Planning

Our podcasts were entirely recorded, edited, and published using low- or no-cost equipment and software. The podcast facilitator, Tyler McBride, had some limited experience with sound editing, but no experience with podcasting before his work on this project. Most of the sound was recorded using an inexpensive audio recording device with a USB port to load the files onto a computer for editing. Some of the sound was also recorded using apps on contributors' phones or tablets, which they then emailed to Tyler for final inclusion in editing. Both of these methods worked well for us and worked with hardware we already had. The audio was then edited into its final form and exported to an MP3 file using Audacity (a free, open source software program available here - <http://www.audacityteam.org/>). The final product was published using SoundCloud (<https://www.soundcloud.com/>), a platform which allows free publishing (up to a certain length) of audio content, which can then be exported and linked to other platforms, such

as social media platforms and podcasting apps on mobile devices. Here's a [short video](#) with tips about using SoundCloud. All episodes of our #StayinTeaching podcast are available at <https://soundcloud.com/stayinteaching>.

The podcast launched with a pilot episode in November 2016. Tyler recorded an interview with Yvette Townsend, a second-year teacher and member of our steering team, about her experiences transitioning from another career into teaching and about her challenges and successes in her first year of teaching. Tyler also recorded a short introduction of our initiative and some brief reflections on attending a professional conference in our state. He edited those clips together, published it to an online platform, and linked to it on the social media presence and email list we had already established. That episode is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/stayinteaching/stay-in-teaching-podcast-issue-1>.

That first episode garnered a fairly small audience. However, it did give us confidence and hope that podcasting was feasible, even given the constraints of our limited time, production experience, and budget. At our summer retreat in 2017, we reaffirmed our interest in podcasting and engaged additional teachers in planning and recording content for the podcast. We hoped that the episodes would be frequent enough to establish a listener base and provide plenty of relevant content for early-career teachers. However, the logistics of recording, editing, and publishing were time consuming, and did not allow us to publish as many episodes as we would have liked.

Following our work at the summer retreat, we published an additional episode in July 2017, which focused on teacher reflections from other steering team members and participants at the #StayinTeaching Edcamp. We used both the Edcamp and the Summer Retreat as an opportunity to record short interviews with EC teachers and a longer discussion among teachers at our retreat. We felt that finding ways to incorporate our face-to-face work into the podcast helped us develop content that was meaningful, authentic, and purposeful. This second episode of our podcast is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/stayinteaching/stay-in-teaching-podcast-episode-2>.

Perceptions

Although the effort to produce podcasts is more substantial than some other #StayinTeaching activities, the results are a product that is enduring and ubiquitously accessible. For this reason, we plan to produce additional episodes and broaden the listening audience for the work.

Social Media

Purpose

“Distracted from distraction, by distraction.” T.S. Eliot

Today’s cultures and lifestyles are increasingly influenced by the world of technology and social media. EC teachers are no exception. Social media may be viewed as a distraction; however, we felt we could use this “distraction” to our advantage. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are beginning to be used not only for personal information, but also to share work-related information, and have become a major avenue for teachers to connect with other teachers on a local, national, and international level. By using Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for the #StayinTeaching initiative we hoped to provide early-career teachers opportunities for networking, mentoring, and professional learning. We began using these avenues in an effort to relieve feelings of isolation and to increase collaboration amongst EC teachers and veteran teachers. We were able to use social media as a way to share ideas and educational articles and to provide connections to others in the field of education. Social media allows for EC teachers to be in touch with the creators of various resources and to ask inquiry questions. Social media platforms can be used to bridge the gaps of isolation in the here and now and provide ongoing connections.

Social media has a broad influence in the world today and is easily at the fingertips of many teachers globally. This broad availability allows us to have an immediate impact in many areas that were identified as reasons for teachers leaving the profession. It allows for ECs to broaden their network of teachers. They are able to have meaningful conversations with others teaching the same content areas, same grade levels, or even those who just share similar teaching philosophies.

Participation in [Twitter chats](#) is one beneficial way for teachers to build that network of colleagues. Providing pre-determined questions to the participants allows them to take a brief moment to develop an idea to share with the group and provide insight. The fast pace of the Twitter chat also allows for individuals to not get caught up on the same topics for extended periods of time. This is important since time is a scarce commodity in the life of EC teachers. A Twitter chat takes approximately thirty minutes, and participants have the opportunity to gain many new colleagues and ideas during this time. And they can participate from anywhere!

Social media is also a great way for individuals to increase the positive image of the teaching profession. As an EC, there is a need to feel valued and have open lines of communication with other colleagues. Social media is a great place to start for EC teachers. Using Twitter chats and posting photos on Instagram and Facebook allows teachers who may be nervous or unsure of sharing to get their ideas out to a global population, all at the touch of a button. This allows others to see the great work that EC teachers are doing everywhere, achieving an increase in the feeling of being valued for the EC teacher. Posting pictures and sharing experiences also opens various lines of communication that may not otherwise have existed. Reaching outside of

the comfort zone of their school, their district, and even their state creates a new place to receive meaningful feedback and form new relationships.

Planning

We created a website, Facebook page, Twitter handle, and Instagram account all using our #StayinTeaching moniker and the same feature photos. We had also planned to create a blog, but this ongoing commitment proved too time-consuming for its early-career teacher host. Each aspect of our social media presence is described below.

Our website can be found at sites.google.com/view/stayinteaching. We chose the old Google Site platform because it was easy to format and allowed us to choose the url for our site (a way to connect the website with our initiative). We initially created the site to share information about Edcamp #StayinTeaching. The site features a calendar and also highlights some past events. It also includes links to our other social media outlets.

Our Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/StayinTeaching>. On the Facebook page we consistently post online content and resources that might be of interest to early-career teachers. In an effort to create a personal, physical connection amongst our Facebook followers, we encouraged teachers to offer tours of their rooms through Facebook posts. We also publicized upcoming #StayinTeaching events and posted about events that were in progress or had already been held. Instagram (@StayinTeaching; #StayinTeaching) also offers this opportunity. The same handle and hashtag are used for Twitter, where we post content and events for early-career teachers. We have also explored using our hashtag to host Twitter chats, as described above.

Perceptions

Use of social media has raised awareness for upcoming events and provided venues for sharing information with early-career teachers. An ongoing concern is the need to keep the content relevant and current. Although this task is not feasible for one early-career teacher, expanding the network of early-career teachers who use our social-media sites would make this task doable. With an active social media audience, the problem of relevant, current content should take care of itself.

Although the number of followers we have on each of these platforms continues to increase, we feel that expanding these numbers would be beneficial for all involved. We hope that sharing information about these platforms with other Writing Project sites will serve this purpose! We also recognize that gaining access to listservs of early-career teachers and mentoring programs could be beneficial. Participating in online media using the @StayinTeaching handle, through likes, shares, comments, and chats could also be beneficial in increasing our social media presence. Using other hashtags, along with our own, might also increase visibility. Another idea we have for increasing our presence, specifically on Twitter, is to host a Twitter chat immediately

before a highly-trafficked chat, such as EdChat. Similar to a smaller band opening for a big name, we think this could potentially raise awareness of our efforts.

We have shared our social media outlets with our university's office of teacher education, asking that they make new teacher candidates aware of these resources. We hope other sites will do the same. Rather than having each site build its own #StayinTeaching social media presence, we hope that we can create a national network for early-career teachers through these venues.

In order to make the presence sustainable, we have also considered our audience. Since our initiative supports early-career teachers at all grade levels and in all content areas, we need to have multiple voices represented (elementary, middle school, high school; multiple content areas and special education). Including guest hosts might help to target this broad range of interests.

Although we recognize that there is much opportunity for growth through social media for our #StayinTeaching initiative, our initial forays have already proven beneficial. We know that promoting our #StayinTeaching events through social media has increased participation, and we hope that the content that has been shared on our social media sites has supported EC teachers. In addition, creating and maintaining our social media presence has provided leadership opportunities for early-career teachers on our steering team who have taken up this work. These EC teachers have the know-how and interest in using social media to keep teachers in the profession.

Extend & Respond

After reading Chapter Four, we hope that you'll want to learn and do more to help teachers #StayinTeaching. Below are some extensions.

- 1) If you have generated a list of early-career teacher friends, share a link to a favorite educational podcast with them.
- 2) Use Google Hangout for an upcoming meeting. Not sure how to use it? Ask an EC teacher!
- 3) Follow the [#StayinTeaching Facebook page](#).
- 4) Tweet using the hashtag #StayinTeaching. Follow @StayinTeaching on Twitter and/or Instagram.
- 5) Share a video tour of your classroom in a comment on [the #StayinTeaching Facebook page](#).

CHAPTER FIVE

Face-to-Face Events

Use of social media seemed like an expected mode for supporting early-career teachers. However, our root-cause work, and later our experiences with early-career teachers, suggest that face-to-face events are also important for keeping teachers in the profession. Lasting networking and mentoring relationships grew out of our face-to-face professional learning events.

EdCamp

Purpose

On April 1, 2017 educators were invited to attend EdCamp #StayinTeaching from 8:00 am – 1:00 pm at a local high school. The event, sponsored by Northwest Arkansas Writing Project, was free. Registration was available online. Participants could stay for part of the day or for the whole event, which included a free breakfast, four breakout sessions, and door prizes during the wrap up.



Amanda Coughlin, a second-year teacher involved in planning EdCamp #StayinTeaching, said this EdCamp was created to provide an opportunity for individualized professional development. “EdCamp allows teachers to be with individuals who share the same concerns or passions, making the sessions that much more meaningful.” Coughlin said.

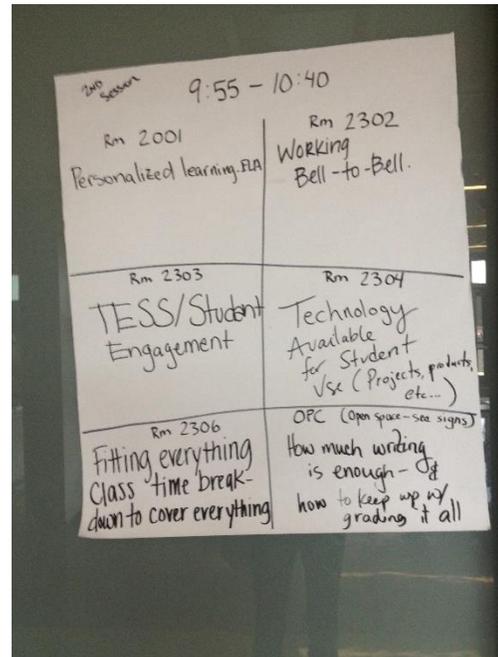
EdCamp is a free “unconference” event designed to create a participant-driven, fun-filled day of professional learning for teachers. Educators can connect with like-minded individuals, collaborate on ideas, brainstorm solutions to common education problems, have group discussion, and receive information that can be immediately applied in the classroom. Sessions are determined the morning of the event, and there are no prescheduled presentations or keynotes. The goal is to keep sessions spontaneous, interactive and responsive to everyone’s needs.

EdCamp #StayinTeaching was specifically intended to provide a space for early-career teachers (first five years), but all were welcome. Giving early-career teachers opportunities to share their knowledge and learn together at an experience like EdCamp supports teacher retention as EC teachers network and learn together.

Planning

EdCamp #StayinTeaching included four breakout sessions plus opening and closing and a cookie break.

The University of Arkansas Educational Renewal Zone provided breakfast and door prizes for EdCamp #StayinTeaching. “The mission of the ERZ is to improve overall public school performance and student academic achievement,” said Lindsey Swagerty, ERZ director, “and we see this EdCamp as an innovative way to address our goals.”



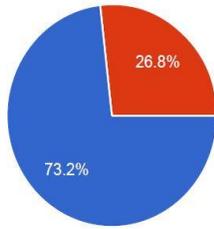
Perceptions

Vicki Collet, who helped organize the event, said EdCamp is an experience that appeals to early-career teachers. Collet is associate director of Northwest Arkansas Writing Project and Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational and Health Professions. “EdCamp is interactive, needs-driven, and technology rich,” Collet said. “This EdCamp was

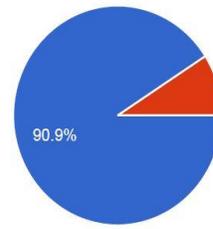
planned primarily by early-career teachers, giving them leadership experience and a chance to share their insight. We hope this EdCamp gave educators across the region the opportunity to discuss effective teaching strategies and work collaboratively,” she said. Below are the results of a quick exit survey we asked participants to complete. As demonstrated in the survey, 73% of participants felt that Edcamp was awesome, and about 91% felt sure they would use something they learned that day. These positive evaluations suggest that the structure of Edcamps is beneficial for EC teachers.

What did you think of EdCamp #StayinTeaching?

Do you think you'll use something you learned today?



3 - Awesome	41	73.2%
2 - Good	15	26.8%
1 - There are many things I would change	0	0%



Yes, I'm sure I will	50	90.9%
I might	5	9.1%
Probably not	0	0%

Fall into Teaching Events

Purpose

At our Fall into Teaching events, our main purposes were to help "newer to the profession" teachers feel valued, learn and practice self-care, and improve their writing instruction. Overall, the night was designed to allow EC teachers to participate in a learning community outside of their building and an opportunity to get new ideas from new acquaintances.

At both the 2016 Fall Event and its sequel in 2017, all three strands that had been identified for supporting early-career teachers were cohesively woven into this social gathering; the event included opportunities for networking, mentoring, and professional learning. This balanced approach gave new teachers and mentors the opportunity to participate together in activities that supported their personal and professional growth. While it was critical for new teachers to have the opportunity to enjoy these opportunities, veteran teachers also gained new insights as they networked with younger teachers and could gain a new perspective about what early-career teachers have to offer. The 2017 event built on successes of the previous year as new and veteran teachers had the opportunity to collaborate, share experiences, and have fun in a relaxed setting. The informal activities at this event took the pressure off new teachers while enticing veteran teachers who also maintain busy schedules.

Planning

The event was scheduled several weeks after school had started, a time when new teachers may have settled into their classrooms and routines but also be feeling a bit overwhelmed by their demanding occupation.

Planning for the Fall into Teaching event took place via Google hangout. Three early-career teachers acted as facilitators, with Dr. Collet arranging the behind-the-scenes work. During our planning meeting, our guiding question was, “What do these EC teachers need at this time?” All teachers need a bit of relaxation at any point in the year, but especially near the beginning. They need professional development that helps guide their writing instruction with research-based information. Professional Learning Communities have been shown to impact student learning, and this event helped broaden teachers’ PLC beyond the teachers just in their building.

During our initial planning meeting, we determined who would take charge of each portion of the event (i.e. getting in contact with those who would offer their services for our “relaxation stations,” handling donations, etc.). We also made plans for publicizing the event via social media, email listservs, administrators in the region, and posters and fliers in area schools. Deadlines were set and a follow-up meeting was held (again via Google Hangouts) just prior to the event.

“Relaxation Stations” during the first 45 min. of the event allowed for teachers to arrive when they could, unwind from the day, and network with one another while they floated between stations. The stations included gratitude journals, a professional book swap, chair massages, office chair yoga, hand care, snack table, adult coloring, soothing music, and making stress balls. We contacted community volunteers to provide some of these stations and event facilitators set up the rest.

Following the relaxation stations were two speakers. The first, a mental health professional from the University health center gave a brief address about ways to manage stress on a busy schedule. Following her remarks, Dr. Collet gave a brief presentation about what to let go of in writing instruction, highlighting time-consuming practices that research suggests are ineffective.

Following the keynote, we had a speed-date formatted event where teachers wrote down an “idea hack” for teaching writing, quickly following a “give one, get one” protocol that where teachers rotated partners every two minutes. After this networking activity, we had dinner and door prizes.

During the 2017 event, we added the [book club kickoff](#) while teachers ate, followed by the mentor/mentee kickoff for those who had signed up. In this way, the face-to-face Fall into Teaching event provided a launch for some of our virtual #StayinTeaching activities, adding a more personal touch.

Perceptions

The Fall into Teaching event provided a relaxing atmosphere for forging networking and mentoring relationships. Free food, door prizes, and fun, relaxing activities lent a festive air, and the focus on self-care allowed for rejuvenation. Since the event started right after school, choosing relaxation stations helped melt away the stress from teachers’ busy day. We felt that

the keynote session on what to keep and what to let go of in writing practices was specific enough that it spoke to things that teachers could incorporate into their daily routines and at the same time was broad enough to cover all age groups of students whose teachers were present. The teachers had ample time to share and collaborate with other teachers during the event, and new relationships were formed. It was helpful that some of our current teacher-consultants came and brought a first-year teacher along with them. We've found that an invitation is a great way to get people involved.

The event was a fun way to get the word out about problems with teacher retention and do something about this problem. Teachers seemed to be having a good time and having academic conversations throughout the evening. We are confident teachers left with renewed energy and new ideas to try.

Like other events in this initiative, the Fall into Teaching event developed leadership qualities for those involved. The facilitators for this event left with experience in leading professional learning. It encouraged them to go back and share information with others in their networking circle. This experience inspired them to seek out additional leadership opportunities to assist in spreading the #StayinTeaching initiative. By cultivating these desires in early-career teachers, we are building a community of passionate educators who love their careers. The event also fostered supported participants by introducing EC teachers to others who are going through the same thing they are experiencing.

Young Writers Camp

Purpose

Young Writers Camp provides an intensive professional learning experience for teachers while also offering an academic summer camp experience for students. Teachers collaborate and learn as they spend a full-day together prior to the camp considering best practices in writing instruction. Then, each afternoon during the camp, teachers share successes and plan together for the next day. We felt that Young Writers camp was a good step on the pathway to leadership for early-career teachers because they could be mentored by more-experienced teaching partners at their camp site, would meet teachers from many districts, and would get paid for their participation (through camp tuition or a district's site sponsorship). Additionally, the camp requires about a two-week commitment, not as intensive as a traditional invitational summer institute. For these reasons, we've included Young Writers camp on our pathway to leadership to help early-career teachers #StayinTeaching.

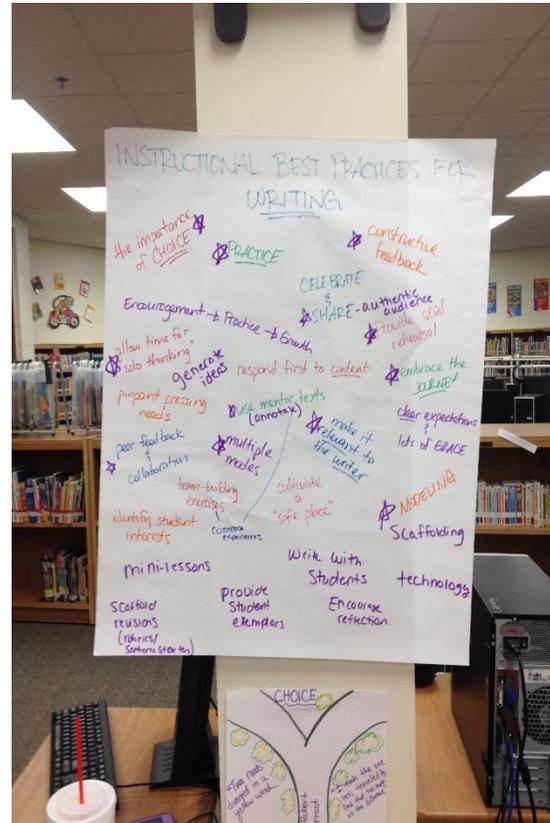


Planning

Young Writers Camp has been held in Northwest Arkansas in 2016 and 2017. An organizational meeting provided the opportunity for teachers to involve their school as a tuition-based site for Young Writers Camp. Additionally, we reached out to schools and districts who might be interested in sponsoring a camp. Three camps were held in the summer of 2016 and five in 2017. Three EC teachers participated in 2016 (including one pre-service teacher) and four EC teachers were involved in 2017, along with more experienced teaching partners.

The camp included both fiction and non-fiction writing opportunities for students as they experimented with many genres in an active camp atmosphere. As teachers planned for these experiences, they considered what they knew for sure about writing instruction and broadened their repertoire to consider other best practices in writing instruction. We also discussed elements of motivation and engagement and created routines that would incorporate these elements.

Young Writers Camp lasted from 8:00 am to noon each day for ten days, with students receiving a “to-go” lunch on their way out the door. After an hour break for lunch (and commuting to a common site), teachers from all five sites gathered to share successes and collaboratively revise plans for the next day. Each afternoon also included a short demonstration lesson, a writing activity the teacher had previously used successfully. Teachers took turns providing this demo. Often the activities from demo lessons were incorporated into camp.



Perceptions

Although there was no formal measure of students’ writing achievement during Young Writers Camp, all of the teachers said they felt students’ writing improved because of participation in the two-week camp. Teachers also said the camp supported their own learning. Participating teachers said that it was “great listening to other people’s feedback” and that they would “take away lots of new tools!” They also said they “worked with amazing people,” that “having the opportunity to immediately apply my new understandings made them stick,” and that they “look forward to more opportunities like this.” Such testimonials are encouraging and point to the benefits of including early-career teachers in Young Writers Camp as a possible step on their pathway to Writing Project leadership.

Writing Marathon & Virtual Writing Marathon

Purpose

The Writing Marathon has become a Writing Project tradition. It is all about [setting people loose to write](#). According to Richard Louth, who has led many writing marathons, it involves a common setting, some socializing, a sense of community, and the routine of writing, reading, and saying “thank you,” over and over again. At the Northwest Arkansas Writing project, our tradition is to include a half-day writing marathon as part of the Invitational Summer Institute, inviting teacher-consultants to join us and initiate the new group. During the #StayinTeaching initiative, we also encouraged our early-career teacher community to join in. Additionally, we designed a new writing marathon experience with EC teachers in mind.



The Virtual Writing Marathon was a chance to write in both real and virtual spaces and document our writing journey @StayinTeaching. The marathon starting line was a 30-minute Google Hangout to provide instructions. Then we navigated, wrote, and posted asynchronously throughout the week. We shared our experiences with other marathoners at the Virtual Marathon Finish Line via another 30-minute Google Hangout.

The purpose of the Virtual Writing Marathon was to connect EC teachers through a unique writing experience and to create new perceptions of writing. When you search for images of reading, you will find pictures of people relaxing with a book. When you search for pictures of people writing, you will find pictures of white knuckles gripping a pencil and sweat coming from someone’s forehead. Our goal was to be seen writing and to create a more positive impression of what writing is or what it could be.

Planning

The first task for this initiative was to establish a group of writers and review the instructions for the marathon. The main goal was to write, write, write! Participants were to set aside time to write when they would be able to stay focused and could write as much as possible. Participants could use their choice of tools when they were writing, whether it be on a computer, with pencil and paper, on a typewriter, or anything else. It was recommended that marathoners write in time slots of at least 30 minutes. They could write with a group of people, with a partner, or individually as long as they held each other accountable. There were no restrictions on the writing. It could be about anything that participants wanted it to be about and in any form – anything from personal reflections to poetry.

At the initial meeting, Virtual Writing Marathon participants were provided with a list of seven writing challenges to work towards and were asked to face at least three of the challenges. The first challenge was to write somewhere outside. Another was to write in a restaurant or a coffee

shop, with bonus points possible if we could create a backstory for other people in the restaurant and make up stories about their lives. The third challenge was to write in a location with a view that was either pleasant or unpleasant. The fourth challenge was to write in an “out of the ordinary” room in our house. Writing before we ate breakfast was the fifth challenge. The sixth was to think of a place we used to visit often, but haven’t gone to in awhile. The last challenge was to write in a place that is usually crowded, but wasn’t crowded at that moment.

At the “finish line,” a Google hangout held the next week, participants were to share what they had written and discuss their experiences in fulfilling the writing challenges.

Perceptions

By participating in this event, marathoners were able to start creating a new outlook on writing. They wrote in places where they had privacy and could dive deep into their own thoughts. In those times, they were able to reflect on things that were personal to them. They also wrote in public places where others could see them enjoying writing. In those times, marathoners were able to use public influences to strike their imaginations for creative writing. They were able to sit and watch the world around them and document what they saw. Most importantly, a community of writers was created who collaborated prior to and upon completing this challenge. The participants networked with each other, shared their writing, and gained a new insight to ways to encourage writing in others.

Writing Retreats

Writing retreats are a long-standing tradition for Northwest Arkansas Writing project, but these retreats, held at remote locations, have a high price tag in terms of money and time. So, as part of #StayinTeaching, we created a low-cost retreat called “Compose Yourself,” held at the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, a local attraction.

Purpose



The “Compose Yourself” writing retreat provided opportunities for networking and professional learning. The retreat took advantage of a local resource, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American

Art, which has inspiring exhibits, meeting areas, and grounds. The retreat was open to writers and teachers of writing, with a special focus on early-career teachers.

The art and surroundings of Crystal Bridges provided inspiration for writing and space to share. Our goals were to write and think together in an inspiring setting and to confer to celebrate and revise. This event provided writers and teachers of writing an opportunity to share ideas, and products, and to learn and practice new response group and collaboration procedures.

Planning

The Compose Yourself Writing Retreat was held on a Friday evening and Saturday, with optional lodging accommodations for anyone outside of the area. Participants wrote and participated in writing response groups in this 1.5-day writing retreat. The schedule for the event included the following events:

June 2: Meet, Write, Response group, Bedtime snack

June 3: Meet & eat, Response group, Write, Response Group, Closing

The event began with a mushroom picking activity where the facilitator provided multiple quotes on learning and teaching, spread out on the floor. Participants selected a quote that they liked and shared the quote and the rationale for selection with another participant.

Writers then learned about the odd practices of famous writers, based on an excerpt from *Odd Type Writers* by C.B. Johnson, and shared information about themselves as writers. Participants had extended time to write on the grounds of Crystal Bridges before meeting to share their work. After composing, two writers shared their pieces and attendees participated in a response group concerning each piece, exploring what listeners liked about the piece, questions they had about the piece, and suggestions for improvement.

Saturday began with participants writing letters to their first year teacher selves, after watching a brief video, "If I Knew Then: A Letter to Me on My First Day Teaching." Then writers shared their favorite lines from their letters in small groups. After additional time to write on the Crystal Bridges property, writers participated in a second response group. The morning concluded with additional writing time, a third response group, and the opportunity for participants to make a heart map in response to a prompts provided by the facilitator. [Heart maps](#), an idea suggested by Georgia Heard, are a way to brainstorm ideas for personal narratives.



After creating their heart maps, participants took about two hours for a final personal composing period. Finally, the retreat concluded with an author's chair where all participants shared pieces of the writing they did during the retreat.

Perceptions

This event was a relaxing experience that provided the opportunity for networking opportunities for teacher consultants. The retreat also required minimal preparation. Although the group that participated was small, it included several early-career teachers and served for them as an introduction to NWP. All have subsequently participated in Site events.

Jean Hill, a Compose Yourself writing retreat participant and early-career teacher, said, "I enjoyed learning from other writers and teachers of writing during this retreat. Even though we all came from different walks of life, this retreat provided us the opportunity refine our own personal craft to become stronger writers. Unfortunately, this rarely happens for educators. It was such a refreshing way to start my summer vacation. In the future, I may take a personal writing retreat for myself at this location to rejuvenate as a writer."

One of our take-aways from Compose Yourself is that public outdoor spaces work well for writing retreats. Although our writing marathons have been held in such spaces, in the past our site has scheduled retreats at more remote locations. During the retreat, multiple types of writing were produced and shared, including poetry, blog posts, short stories, and letter. Participants had designated time and space for reflection, writing, and sharing. They worked through the writing process through the lens of both a reader and writer. The practice was useful for all participants, who taught writing in secondary or post-secondary settings.

Although we kept the cost low for individual participants, the overall cost for the site was high because of fees to use a meeting room at the museum. In the future, to increase participation, we might consider holding this event at another time of year; perhaps obligations right after school got out kept participation low. We might also use free spaces within the museum for our meeting areas to eliminate the overhead and make the cost for individual participation even lower. We might also consider other low-cost or free venues in the future.

Conclusion

Face-to-face events are important for keeping teachers in the profession. Lasting networking and mentoring relationships grew out of the face-to-face #StayinTeaching mentoring events described above. Although EC teachers are busy with the day-to-day tasks of building and carrying out a curriculum, when offered an personal invitation, we have found that they will often make time to attend such activities – and when they do, these Writing Project activities are steps on their pathway to leadership.

Extend & Respond

After reading Chapter Five, we hope that you'll want to learn and do more to help teachers #StayinTeaching. Below are some extensions.

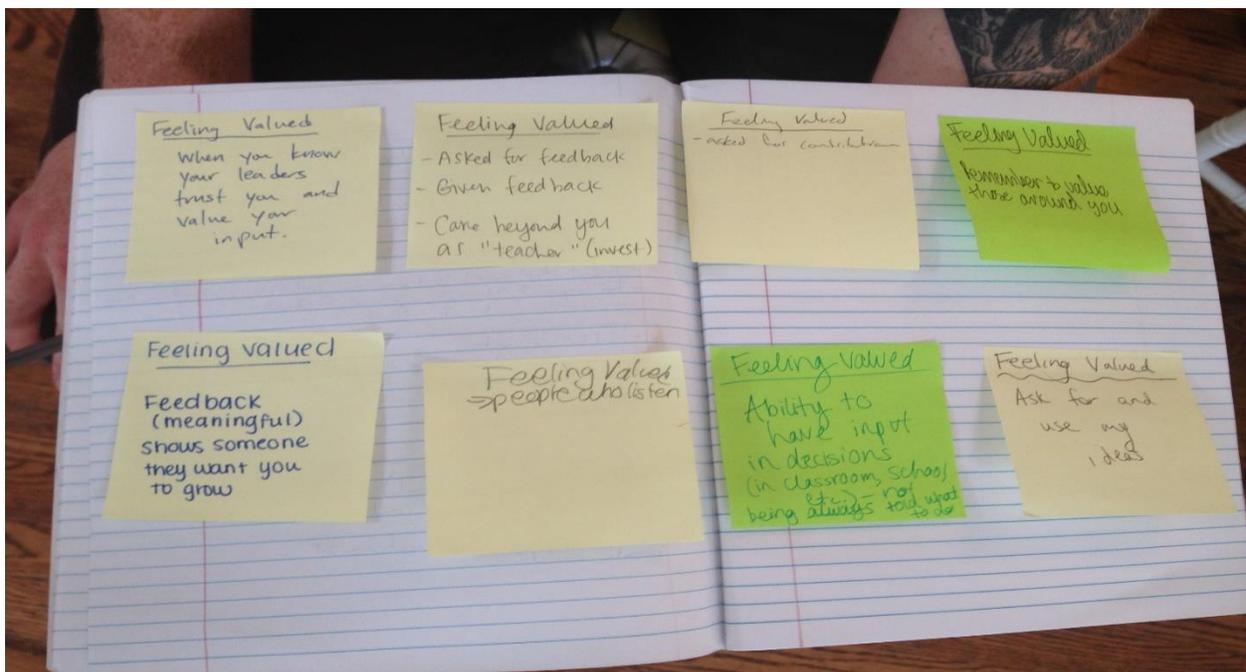
- 1) What face-to-face experiences for mentoring, networking, and professional learning are available in your area? Choose one and invite an early-career teacher to go along with you. Offer a ride!
- 2) Are there other experiences that might support early-career teachers? Brainstorm with others and commit to offering one of these opportunities to teachers at your school or site.

CHAPTER SIX

Outcomes: Pathways to Leadership

Early-Career Teachers on a Pathway

The #StayinTeaching initiative has put many early-career teachers in our area on a pathway to Writing Project leadership. Beginning with our initial #StayinTeaching Steering Team Retreat, which was the first Writing Project activity for many participants, EC teacher participants felt the event might be a stepping stone to leadership for those who participated. The event helped them find out about what our Writing Project site is all about and feel connected without having to make the huge commitment of a summer institute that they might not be ready for at that point in their career. They passionately described how the retreat gave them a voice, that they felt their thoughts were being valued, and that they were excited about being involved in the Writing Project in other ways. This validated that, even for those who had no previous exposure to the Writing Project, the retreat was a positive experience and something they wanted to build from. These EC teachers brought potential, energy, and willingness to share. It was exciting to be with them and generate ideas with together. Participants commented that they “really looked forward to deeply investing” in the Writing Project work, specifically the #StayinTeaching initiative. Our experience with the Steering Team was an affirmation that early-career teachers have much to offer the Writing Project and that having an avenue for sharing their voice and feeling valued and respected is a need for *everyone*, and an especial need of early-career teachers, who may feel unconfident at times and overworked and overwhelmed. (See below for notes from the [Steering Team Retreat](#) about feeling valued).



The #StayinTeaching initiative supports early-career teachers when they need it most – in their first years of teaching. The pathway we have created makes Writing Project experiences more available and accessible, not just to EC teachers, but to others as well; for example, rural teachers have participated in our #StayinTeaching virtual events. The #StayinTeaching project defines new pathways to leadership that include EC teachers early and often, providing incremental steps toward leadership, involving them in both innovative and traditional writing project events. This helps EC teachers gain leadership experience and supports our Writing Project networks as they are revitalized by the energy of these early-career teachers. By involving EC teachers in WP events early and providing small steps along the path to leadership, we hope these New Pathways to Leadership will help EC teachers #StayinTeaching.



The work we have done in creating new pathways to leadership for early-career teachers aligns with NWP’s identification of key [Writing Project social practices](#) and objectives for [flexible pathways to leadership](#). National Writing Project recognizes that the time-honored pathway to leadership of participating in a traditional Invitational Summer Institute may not be the best course for every teacher. NWP is exploring opportunities for badging/microcredentialing to build a pathway to leadership and has supported sites in creating alternative pathways to leadership. Our #StayinTeaching initiative is an outcome of that work.

As we created new pathways to leadership for early-career teachers, we felt it was important to keep core Writing Project principles in mind, incorporating the social practices. Here is a key to the social practices Writing Project has identified:

Key: Write Learn Lead
Go Public Collaborate Advocate

The social practices are color-coded to the photo below - a game that's a model for how early-career teachers can "build their home" in the Writing Project. The game shows how "players" engage in the various Writing Project social practices through participation in multiple Writing Project events (each of the dots at the stations is color-coded for one of the social practices), taking incremental steps toward leadership.

In this game model of our pathway, players move to various building supply stores, collecting pieces to build their Writing Project home. For example, teachers might attend the traditional Invitational Summer Institute, where they would collect all of the pieces for their house by participating in all of the identified Writing Project social practices. However, alternative pathways are also available. A teacher might gain experience with the social practice of writing by participating in the Virtual Writing Marathon, pick up the pieces for advocating, collaborating, and learning at the Fall into Teaching event, and then lead and go public with practice during Young Writers Camp. Together, these experiences provide opportunities for all of the social practices, and depending on their level of participation in each, they might move to the status of teacher-consultant. Bestowal of this title would be determined after the candidate met with one of the Site directors – a meeting that could be initiated by either the director or the teacher. Although we have multiple EC teachers "playing the game" – on the pathway to leadership, we have not yet had anyone "gather all the pieces."



Whether or not other Sites choose to focus on early-career teachers, the model demonstrates how participating in multiple Writing Project experiences can add up to a pathway to leadership that is an alternative to (or includes) the Summer Institute.

Leading Events for Early-Career Teachers and Veteran Colleagues

Not only did the events created for the #StayinTeaching pathway provide for Writing Project experiences, it gave EC teachers leadership opportunities as they helped to plan and facilitate these events. For example, the [#StayinTeaching EdCamp](#) was facilitated by EC teachers, who found the venue for the event and directed activities throughout the day. At the [Fall into Teaching event](#), EC teachers created several of the Relaxation Stations and conducted the event. EC teachers created the Instagram and Twitter accounts, designed the #StayinTeaching webpage, and contributed to the content of each of these [social media platforms](#). Most of the [#StayinTeaching Google Hangouts](#) were facilitated by EC teachers, and all of the podcasts were produced by an early-career teacher. Our [Virtual Writing Marathon](#) and [Book Club](#) were also facilitated by EC teachers. Since these events, although specifically designed for early-career teachers, were open to teachers of all experience levels, EC teachers were leading not only other EC's but also their more experienced peers. Having EC's in these leadership roles helped veteran teachers see EC teachers in a new light, recognizing them as contributors to the profession. Participation of EC teachers in these roles gave them experience and confidence and helped them see their own leadership capacity. They saw themselves as part of a community of teacher leaders; they said they were “finding our people” – a group of like-minded professionals, including ECs and veteran teachers, who shared important philosophies about teaching and learning. They described feelings of direction, connection, empowerment, and confidence; they said they felt knowledgeable, developed collaboration and leadership skills, gained new ideas, and felt refreshed as they provided leadership for #StayinTeaching events.

Through their leadership, #StayinTeaching steering team members have become unofficial mentors and exemplars for other early-career teachers. This has been a plus for our Writing Project Site, as we have had more teachers doing things in the name of the Writing Project and understanding the norms involved.

Conference Participation & Presentations

Members of the #StayinTeaching steering team have had the opportunity to attend and present at National Writing Project meetings. Their attendance at Building New Pathways to Leadership meetings in Washington D.C. and New Orleans were exciting for them, allowed them to connect with leaders from other Writing Project sites, and enhanced their view of themselves as leaders.



EC teachers also presented about our project at the 2016 and 2017 Annual Writing Project Meetings. Their confidence in answering questions about the initiative they had helped to create was apparent. Both Tyler McBride and Allison Evans, who presented at the Annual Meeting, also presented at the National Conference of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference, evidence of their growing confidence as professionals.

Products

Products created by and for early-career teachers provide additional evidence of the impact of the #StayinTeaching initiative. For example, Tyler McBride published an article in NCTE's *English Leadership Quarterly* journal. In the article, Tyler shares the story of how he revitalized his career as an early-career teacher. Tyler's article can be found [here](#).

A district administrator was a member of our initial #StayinTeaching steering team. As a result of our summer retreat, she created a monthly calendar for early-career teachers in her district, highlighting important activities and deadlines. An example of her [calendar](#) is in the appendix.

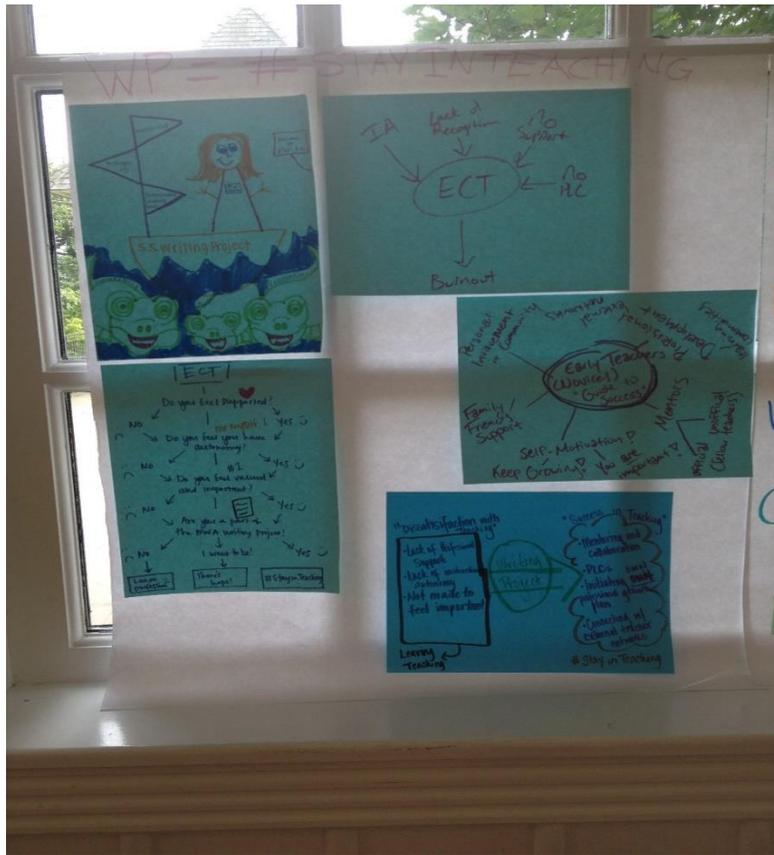
Presentations and products demonstrate outcomes of the #StayinTeaching initiative. Less obvious, but perhaps more powerful, outcomes are evident in the lives of EC teachers, particularly those on the #StayinTeaching steering committee.

Their Stories

Tyler's story of change and empowerment are described in both his [interview](#), his [article](#), and his "[Why I Stay](#)" letter. Similarly, others stories are document in their "Why I Stay" and "[Letter to My First-Year Teacher Self](#)."

Another story worth telling is that of Angela (pseudonym). Angela felt undervalued by her principal, who frequently made demeaning remarks about Angela and her teaching. When Dr. Collet called to talk with the principal about Angela's participation with #StayinTeaching, the principal expressed unveiled incredulity that Angela had something to offer. However, this perception changed as Angela participated in many Writing Project activities, both as a participant and as a leader. When communicating with the principal, Dr. Collet intentionally emphasized Angela's strengths and the honor that was being extended in giving Angela responsibilities for Writing Project leadership, empowering her in the eyes of her administrator. In her involvement with Writing Project activities, Angela performed with diligence and excellence and was deserving of this praise. Ultimately, the principal recognized Angela's contributions at her school as well. This change gave Angela the confidence to interview for and be hired by a more supportive administrator. Angela has expressed gratitude for the role of the #StayinTeaching initiative in supporting this transformation.

Reflections on #StayinTeaching



As the graphics (to the left) created during the [2017 #StayinTeaching Steering Team Summer Retreat](#) demonstrate, this initiative helps teachers #StayinTeaching. The initiative was co-planned with and by early-career teachers. We started with a blank piece of paper, ready to investigate needs and build the work together. Early-career teachers took on leadership roles, with the support of Site leadership. EC teachers said they were appreciative of this support. They felt it was important to have someone to reflect with, someone who “had our back and sent the message, ‘I am not going to let you fail.’” Although failure wasn’t an option, there have been roadblocks along the way.

Roadblocks

Two major, related roadblocks afflicted our #StayinTeaching work. The first is the busy-ness of early-career teachers. The second, related, roadblock was low participation in some #StayinTeaching events.

Being busy is an acknowledge attribute of early-career teachers. It takes time to create almost every lesson from scratch. It takes time to develop efficient systems for providing feedback to students. It takes time to figure out the reporting requirements of your school and district. It takes time to figure out how to get things done in a new setting. Coupled with this, many new teachers are also experiencing “adulting” – taking on new roles and routines such as housing, budgeting, and family responsibilities. Because of these many new roles and responsibilities, early-career teachers often feel over-busy and overwhelmed. Adding additional tasks, whether attending or leading a professional learning activity, can tip an already unbalanced load. Our greatest challenge in this work has been finding a balance in the events we provide so that early-career teachers feel supported and empowered rather than burdened and over-extended.

Being mindful of the busy-ness of EC teachers, we aimed for efficiency in our #StayinTeaching events. Online events were planned and participated in from wherever the teacher happened to be at the time. Face-to-face events were mostly planned via Google Hangout to eliminate travel time. Content created served multiple purposes. For example, the School's Out Google Hangout was repeated, with minor revisions, as the School's In Google Hangout. A presentation at the Fall event became another Google Hangout. Events such as the #StayinTeaching Edcamp required minimal planning, a feature of Edcamps that adds flexibility and responsiveness to the professional learning experience. We kept the demanding schedules of early-career teachers in mind when planning and implementing events. However, we believe that tight schedules still impeded teachers' participation in #StayinTeaching events.

This was the other roadblock we faced in the initiative: low participation in some #StayinTeaching events. We sometimes played this to our advantage (e.g., repeating a Google Hangout). However, we were always mindful that our initiative was only as powerful as the teachers who it touched, so we made attempts to increase participation.

For some events, we were able to incentivize early-career teachers to attend and participate. Because of grant funding, we offered stipends for early-career teachers to facilitate the experiences we had planned. Even so, we had no volunteers for videographers, who would have attended and captured footage of our events. Although we had initially budgeted for stipends only for the mentors in the #StayinTeaching mentoring program (thinking that having a mentor would be sufficient incentive), lower-than-hoped-for participation in previous activities encouraged us to add a stipend for mentees. We noticed that early-career teachers were more likely to attend if accompanied by a friend, so we encouraged our teacher-consultants to attend events and invite an early-career teacher to join them. We also gathered donations to use as doorprizes at events like our #StayinTeaching EdCamp. We are unsure about cause-and-effect relationships but suspect that stipends, invitations, and free resources motivated participation in some #StayinTeaching events.

We also knew that communication was key to the success of our initiative. If EC teachers didn't know about our resources, they would not be able to use them or attend #StayinTeaching events. So we worked throughout the initiative to expand our listserv of early-career teachers. We asked our current contacts to spread the word about upcoming events. Event registration included providing an email address, which was then added to the list. We worked with our office of teacher licensure to gather addresses for recent graduates who had received their teaching licenses. These moves helped expand our base, but increasing participation is an ongoing effort. We haven't felt too badly when participation was low, however, because each event, whether attended by few or many, was a learning experience for the EC teachers who planned it.

Although we have made inroads into overcoming these roadblocks, we acknowledge them as obstacles to our ongoing work.

Next Steps for Our Site

At the Northwest Arkansas Writing Project site, we expect to continue our work in creating new pathways to leadership. A shift in mentoring responsibilities in our state creates a need for induction that supports early-career teachers. This need is mirrored nationwide as many teachers enter the profession with alternative licensure and are looking for professional learning experiences so that they can meet the needs of the learners in their classrooms. The #StayinTeaching initiative poises us to do this work and to slow the attrition of early-career teachers. We want to stop the revolving door created when EC teachers leave the profession in high numbers. If these teachers gain experience in the profession, they will have more to offer the students they teach and more to offer their local Writing Project sites.

To support teachers during their early years in the profession, we plan to continue with the events for EC teachers that have been most successful and also to continue inviting EC teachers to long-standing Writing Project events. In addition, we will reach out to other organizations that are active in induction activities, such as our regional education cooperative and state department of education. Partnering with these organizations could amplify our efforts as we work together on the common goal of supporting new teachers. These organizations might also be able to provide some funding for our events, a need that we have identified as we recognize EC teachers' desire to be recognized, valued, and compensated for their contributions. Seeking additional grant funding and partnering with local businesses are additional avenues we will pursue for supporting the work.

An Invitation to Join the Work of Building New Pathways to Writing Project Leadership

This book describes our work to support early-career teachers and encourage them to #StayinTeaching. We believe the design we have used is one that can be taken up by other Writing Project sites, and we invite you to join us in this important work. EC teachers are a population that has been underserved by our Writing Project site because the traditional pathway to leadership (participation in our Invitational Summer Institute) is out of the reach of EC teachers as they participate in required new-teacher orientations and prepare rooms and lessons for the upcoming school year. Creating a pathway to leadership that incrementally involves teachers in Writing Project social practices allows for participation of EC teachers and others for whom the ISI is untenable.

If a focus on supporting early-career teachers is appropriate for your site, we hope you'll join us in the work of reducing teacher attrition and creating pathways to leadership for EC teachers. By doing so, we think you'll find that your site, like ours, will be invigorated by the enthusiasm and expertise that EC teachers bring to the table. We also hope other sites will join us on our existing social media platforms on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Let's post, Tweet, like, and share #StayinTeaching!

Whether or not you choose to focus on early-career teachers, the model we have developed demonstrates how being involved in multiple Writing Project experiences can add up to a pathway to leadership that is an alternative to (or includes) the Summer Institute. Are there other teacher populations that have been underserved by your site? The pathway we have described could be adapted to serve these populations.

As you consider the events that we have included in our #StayinTeaching pathway, a challenge will be to consider what is idiosyncratic about our site and what is generalizable to yours. Which practices are exportable? What modifications might be needed to make the work appropriate for your context? We hope that thinking about the work we did will be useful as you create a vision for your site about broadening the range of teachers to whom you are providing leadership opportunities. Whatever population you choose as your focus, we hope the outcome will be more teachers doing more Writing Project work.

Conclusion

In our region, we've seen many benefits as an outcome of the #StayinTeaching initiative. Professional networks have developed that include both EC and veteran teachers. We have piloted stronger, more authentic mentoring programs. Teachers of all experience levels have gained valuable tools to take back to their classrooms and schools. And there are ongoing opportunities for teachers to create and share content via our social media platforms. These changes benefit all teachers. After all, it isn't just the early-career teachers that we want to keep in the profession. Peers and students benefit when veteran teachers #StayinTeaching.

Reflecting on their involvement with #StayinTeaching, EC teachers said that it provided "a tool to meet like-minded people" and "an opportunity for leadership." An EC teacher said, "I look forward to deeply investing in NWP work." We, too, look forward to her participation. Another EC teacher said, "Our enthusiasm can change the culture of our schools." We concur, and feel that the enthusiasm and expertise of EC teachers can also improve the culture of our Writing Project sites and ensure that a continuation of the important work that Writing Project sites have undertaken.

"I look forward to deeply investing in NWP work."

The #StayinTeaching work we have undertaken holds promise for addressing a vexing local and national problem: Too many potentially-strong teacher leaders leave the profession during their first years of teaching. We need early-career teachers in our circle!



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Appendices

Appendix A: 2016 Steering Team Retreat Agenda



Northwest Arkansas National Writing Project
Stay in Teaching Retreat: Building New Pathways to Leadership
June 23-24, 9:00 – 5:00

Essential Questions:

- How does the exit of early-career teachers impact the profession? How does it impact students' learning?
- Why do early-career teachers leave the profession?
- What might help early-career teachers stay in teaching?
- How might connections with Writing Project keep early-career teachers in the profession?

Introductions & Overview

- **Quote Activity:** Quotes about Teaching
 - Introduce yourself, read your quote, tell why you picked it, listen, switch
- **Review Agenda**
 - Which Essential Question are you most curious about?
- **Celebration and Reflection Activities**

What brought you here?

There is a problem.

- Grant Proposal
- Common Article
- Choice Articles

How would it look if there wasn't a problem?

- Back to the Future Protocol

What are the causes of the problem?

"If you don't ask the right questions, you don't get the right answers. A question asked in the right way often points to its own answer. Asking questions is the ABC of diagnosis. Only the inquiring mind solves problems."

– Edward Hodnett

- 5 Whys Interview
- Fishbone Protocol + 5 Whys

Closing, Day 1

- White Elephant Book pick
- Homework: Prepare a 1-min. review of your book

Opening Day 2

- Book talks
- Post on Facebook, Twitter, etc.: Stay in Teaching (FB)/#StayinTeaching

What are the solutions to the problem? (Day 2)

- Evaluate Survey data
- Brainstorming protocols

*Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.
~Reinhold Niebuhr*

How will this happen?

- Next steps

Closing

- Revisit Essential question
- Closure

Appendix B: List of Problem-Solving Protocols at First Summer Retreat

Quote Activity

Description: Quotes about teaching are scattered around the table. Everyone finds one they like. For about 10 minutes, participants find a partner, introduce themselves, read their quote, and tell why they like it. Then they **switch quotes** so that they have their partner's quote, and they go find a new partner.

Purpose: Introductions and focus.

Metro Map

Description: Each person identifies three crucial events that brought them to where they are, drawing a line from the edge of the group's chart paper to today's stop and marking the three steps along the way. Take turns explaining the stops to your group. Consider similarities & differences.

Purpose: Recognize the common and disparate experiences we bring to the table.

Affinity Mapping

Description: Readers jot important ideas on separate sticky notes. The group silently posts and categorizes the notes. Then they collaboratively name the categories.

Purpose: Provide an overview of literature related to the problem and synthesize our thinking about this background knowledge.

Last Word Protocol

Description: After reading a text, participants their favorite sentence with their small group and tell why they chose it. Then each shares a phrase without commenting. Finally, each shares a single meaningful word from the text. This might be written on a strip of paper and shared with the larger group.

Purpose: Leave important ideas from the literature lingering in our minds as we move forward.

One Word Stories

Description: Participants form a circle and decide on (or are assigned) characters and a setting for their story. The story is told with each participant adding only one word at a time, moving around the circle until two add "the" and "end." (For our version, the main character was an early-career teacher)

Purpose: Have fun, build relationships, recharge our brains, and provide more context for our problem-solving.

Back to the Future

Description: Participants project into the future about the situation they are focusing on, speaking in the present tense to describe the best case scenario. Then participants look back, speaking in the past tense about how things are currently.

Purpose: Envision possibilities for a future without the problem; help us begin to consider causes of the problem.

Snowball Fight

Description: Participants write a response on a paper, wad it up, and have a snow ball fight, unwadding and reading every “snowball” that comes their way.

Purpose: Have fun, build relationships, recharge our brains, and refocus on problems of early-career teachers.

5 Why’s Interview

Description: Facilitator interviews participant about the problem under investigation, repeatedly asking “why” to peel back layers of the problem.

Purpose: Create a more in-depth understanding of the problem through an individual case.

Fishbone Protocol + 5 Whys

Description: Create a fishbone that details in finer and finer detail possible causes of a problem.

Purpose: Uncover root causes of problem.

Gallery Walk

Description: Working in small groups, participants chart their thinking about a topic. Then groups move from chart to chart, discussing, taking notes, or adding to the charts.

Purpose: Overview of work that has been created in smaller groups; in this case, the fishbone analyses.

T Charts (Causes/Solutions)

Description: Two-column notes listing problems/causes on one side and effects/solutions on the other.

Purpose: Begin to think about solutions for underlying problems that have been identified.

Gallery Walk

Description: Working in small groups, participants chart their thinking about a topic. Then groups move from chart to chart, discussing, taking notes, or adding to the charts.

Purpose: Overview of work that has been created in smaller groups; in this case, analysis of survey data.

Zip, Zap, Zop

Description: Participants pass energy around the group by making eye contact with the person they are sending the energy to, using the sequence of words: Zip, Zap, Zop.

Purpose: Brain warm up; preparing for deep, independent thinking.

Silent Chalk Talk

Description: Participants respond silently to questions or topics that have been posted on charts. Participants move from chart to chart, writing original comments and responding in writing to others' comments.

Purpose: Brainstorm and respond to ideas related to initial solutions that have surfaced.

Beach Ball Debrief

Description: Standing in a circle, participants toss the beach ball to each other; the receiver shares their take-away or comment and then passes to someone who hasn't had the ball yet.

Purpose: Whole group debrief to share take aways from previous protocol.

Peeling the Onion

Description: Participants consider a problem in depth by uncovering assumptions and asking questions to gain insights that may not have been previously considered.

Purpose: To recognize the complexity of the problem and delay premature solutions.

Wagon Wheels + **Back-to-Back/ Face-to-Face**

Description: Participants stand in an inner and outer circle, identifying a partner for each question or prompt and rotating as directed between questions. They consider the question while standing back to back, then take turns responding when face to face.

Purpose: To connect with multiple individuals and quickly generate actionable ideas

Focus Groups

Description: Participants work in small groups to consider an issue more deeply.

Purpose: Evaluate and go deeper with ideas proposed during Wagon Wheels protocol

Note: During this retreat, participants then *individually* selected their favorite response to each of the Wagon Wheels questions and wrote it on a sticky note.

Realms of Concern/Realms of Influence

Description: Participants determine all of the things they are concerned about and which of those concerns they can have direct influence over.

Purpose: Begin to consider the "actionability" of our ideas. During the retreat, this protocol was used to narrow possible solutions.

Sticky Sorts

Description: Proposed solutions are sorted.

Purpose: Continue considering the "actionability" of our ideas. During the retreat, solutions that had been proposed were sorted first by cost, then by timeline.

Dot Voting

Description: Participants receive a limited number of dot stickers and place them next to the ideas they feel are most promising.

Purpose: Select foci for our work

Charades

Description: Participants act out scenarios.

Purpose: Help us envision possible outcomes of our work.

Focus Groups

Description: Participants meet in small groups to consider ideas more deeply.

Purpose: Explore how to put ideas into action. During the retreat, each focus group considered one of the solutions that had been identified, using those within our realm of influence/by November 2016.

Commitment

Description: Each participant chooses a solution to be a part of; their name is recorded on the chart.

Purpose: Determine by whom the work will get done.

Worst Fears/Best Hopes

Description: Participants list their worst fear about the outcomes of the work on one side of a card and their best hope on the other. These are collected and read anonymously by the facilitator.

Purpose: Establish group ownership for expectations.

Appendix C: Letters to My First-Year Teacher Self

To My First-Year Self:

It gets better. Not easier, but better. You will have experiences, encounters, and conversations that will make you evolve. A sort of unconscious but necessary evolution. For staying stagnant isn't an option in this profession, and you will be acutely aware of this. Your students are always changing, your administration may come and go, new leaders may emerge in your district, and every new change brings a new opportunity to change yourself, to step out of your comfort zone, to create and re-create, to challenge and push yourself—for isn't that what we are asking our kids to do each and every day?

You will have hard days (remember, I said it would get better, not easier). Days where you wonder why the hell you're even doing this, days where everything you've worked for feels like a waste, where you wonder if you're even making a difference. You will have days of frustration, complacency, regret, indecisiveness... Days where you feel completely lost and alone. But here's what you say, a little reminder to yourself: You are not alone. You have people who have blazed the trails before you, people who believe in you, students who trust you, and colleagues who back you. And after all, you have you—you have the spark that ignited this whole journey still illuminating your spirit, and that won't ever go away. You are doing this for a reason, so don't ever lose sight of that reason, for it is your hope and salvation, it breathes air into your being and life into your soul and meaning and purpose into your work.

Changing lives through education isn't a new phenomenon. You are not the first to desire this lofty ambition, but you could be one of the few who reaches that professional pinnacle. And the ripple effect may never be truly revealed to you. All the lives you have touched, do touch, will touch...unknown. And this is the beauty of the art we call teaching. It is not simply a profession for which you are paid for your practice—your degrees don't matter here. All that matters is the light you provide to illuminate your students' paths. Where will you lead them? And, in turn, how will you show them how to light their own way?

As you can see, it's no easy feat (remember, better not easier). And as the years fly by, the intercrossing of all these paths, the web you weave, may come back your way someday... in a letter, a graduation announcement, a friendly hello... Imagine the beauty of this world if all paths were illumined with the spark of passion that ignited your journey. Imagine the interconnected, intertwining webs woven across this vast canvas we call Earth. So don't lose heart when you feel overwhelmed, overworked, or overused. Don't lose sight when you feel defeated, frustrated, or disenchanted. Don't lose hope, for hope fuels the fire and the fire is lighting the path for generations to come.

Sincerely,
You, A Few Years Down the Path
(Annalise Parker)

Dear Vicki,

You may think you know about teaching now (having graduated and done your student teaching), but you still have much to learn. I don't know if you can do it yet, but really work at building relationships with students. That will make more difference than anything. Pay attention—not just to student misbehavior, but to student learning. As you pay more attention to the latter, the former will decrease. If you learn from your students, life will be much better.

Just warning you - there are tough times ahead. But you'll make it through. And one day you'll be helping others make it through their first weeks of their first year. Hard to believe now as you struggle with classroom management. Keep the words "firm," "fair," and "friendly" in head. Your assistant principal will share these in a back-to-school letter in your second year, but if you have them now, they will make all the difference. And you'll share those same words with future teachers entering their first classroom.....and it will make a difference for them.

About those tough times....During your first week of school, you will learn what "pops" are (were?) in the South. You will be explaining the rules in the school handbook, describing that boys' shirt tails must be in (really??), and a student will explain that the consequence of shirt-tails out is "pops" from the assistant principal. You will not be willing to admit that you think "pop" is soda you get from a vending machine, so you'll remain in confusion until your first trip to the principal's office with a student. Then you'll find out that you, the teacher who sent him there, are required to witness the three pops the student gets from the assistant principal for misbehavior. You will watch in horror as the student bends over, as directed, to grab his ankles while the assistant principal wields her wooden paddle. You will vow never to send a student to the office again.

You will get anonymous death threats, but don't worry (and don't let your husband worry) – they are just threats. You won't know it until after the police tap your phone, but the phone threats are from the girl you sent to the office even though you swore you'd never send another. But she got the best of you. So you watched when she was suspended, picked up by her mother, and thrashed with the leather belt her mother pulled from her jeans as they walked to the car. This time, you really will NEVER send another student to the principal's office. You'll figure it out.

Despite the death threats, the pops, the required grammar lessons, the early-adolescent insecurities of your students, this is where you were meant to be. Next year will be better. But even 35 years later, you'll still remember these days. You'll recognize that this was not your best teaching, but it was the beginning of a path to being your best teacher self. So don't give up! Keep moving down that path!

Keep the faith!

Your Future Self

Dear Future Self,

Your letter is unique in that your first year of teaching will begin in less than two months. Accepting your first teaching position has come with many emotions: relief, nervousness, and excitement. The various emotions that come with teaching children will continue to plague you and inspire you throughout the upcoming year.

On your first day of school – and throughout the year – remind yourself of your favorite teachers and what qualities made them and their class so enjoyable. Model yourself and your teaching after those qualities.

Be fun, but be fair.

Remember what you learned in the M.A.T. program. Remember what you learned during your student teaching. What lessons worked then might not work in your own classroom, but others may turn out to be gold. Try everything, but don't drown yourself in all of your ideas. Remember what Dr. Norton said, allow yourself to fail and allow yourself to be vulnerable. Lean on the other teachers in the building and ask questions. Keep investigating new learning communities because these support systems will be essential in your growth as an educator.

Get to know your students and allow them to get to know you.

Your students will come to your class every day with their own celebrations as well as their own setbacks. Celebrate their accomplishments and be there to help them navigate their obstacles. Prepare yourself to love each and every student, especially the ones with whom you struggle the most.

Relax.

You've received adequate training and you've spent years studying your content area. Most importantly, you want to be here. You're supposed to be here. Enjoy decorating your classroom and creating engaging lessons, activities, and projects. This upcoming year will likely be the most challenging year you've faced, but it will be worth it every day.

Love,
Lauren
(Lauren Boatright)

Dear Katie,

As you're walking (well, being jostled) down the BHS hallways with your box of books and laptop bag, as you're sitting in your "cloffice" (the converted closet-office you'll spend your first year deskbound in) scarfing down that peanut butter sandwich you ate every single day (because you were still figuring out how to adult), as you're sitting in your car after school – sometimes feeling like crying, sometimes actually crying, most times feeling numb and exhausted – remember who you are at the core. This is the person and the teacher you need to remember, that you will get closer to becoming each day, each year, the person who right now feels forgotten beneath stress and expectations and lost causes and failed lessons and stacks of papers. Don't lose who you are, don't lose hope. You are becoming.

You marched into the front of your first borrowed classroom (because you didn't have your own yet), bright-eyed and full of the naïve energy of an idealist ready to take on the world with her books and pencils, brimming with ideas and hope to inspire and to teach. You had a stubborn premonition – no, you knew with certainty – that every student of yours would walk out of your classroom at the end of the year loving reading, writing to change the world, discussing passionately, understanding the power of knowledge. You said all of this to your students as you bounced around the room on that first day, but you were only met with blank stares, raised eyebrows, hidden snickers, looks of confusion. One student responded, with pride, "Ms. Hill, I don't think any of us have read a book since Captain Underpants in 6th grade." One student asked if he could go to the bathroom. Two others got out their phones. You felt disheartened, yet eager for the challenge.

This sort of apathy slapped you in the face nearly every day as you walked into 8th period, forcing your gaze upon a void of aliteracy and disengagement. You dreaded that 2:25 bell knowing that Tanner would fall asleep, Jazzman would get upset with someone (probably you), Dylan would ask 50 irrelevant questions, Adriana and Desiree would have to be separated for talking too much, Hagan would maybe or maybe not say an inappropriate word (or five) while discussing your whole class novel. As the year went on, no longer did you feel you had the luxury of having dreams, you had to focus on the concrete, the here and now: how could you keep 30 students – the misfits of the school, they had identified themselves – on task? How could you keep kids from walking around when they were supposed to be reading? How could you make sure these students weren't too hungry to learn that day? These were the days you found yourself in your car, sitting, searching, sometimes crying, and making plans for your future career somewhere far, far away from there. You wanted to leave your box of books on the curb, your silly dreams and goals, and drive off into that future now. You no longer felt like yourself. In fact, you couldn't even remember why you were there in the first place.

But then that sunny, early spring day in March happened. You were supposed to be doing a poetry lesson. But you had gone to a department meeting during lunch, trusty peanut butter sandwich in hand, that completely recalibrated, reenergized, and rejuvenated you. Your department chair, a master teacher who knew exactly what her worn-thin colleagues needed in the barrage of testing and standards that is the spring semester, had invited some of her students

in to read excerpts from their memoirs. As you found yourself laughing and crying and feeling their emotions and energy as they opened up and read their lives to you, a well of feeling and empathy opened up inside you, washing away your new found cynicism, exposing your raw true self. For the first time in a long time, you suddenly remembered who you were and why you were there. You wanted your students to have this same experience when they left your classroom – to ultimately know the awesome creative powers of words, to know how to make story-sense of their lives and the world around them.

You knew what was best for your students that afternoon, the human beings who came to your classroom each day – the ones who were desperate to connect, to feel known, to know – and you knew what you had to do. You trusted yourself, the teacher and the person who you were becoming, and who you were in that moment. You tossed the poetry lesson, the one you had worked on for hours the night before, and you had students write and share their six word stories. In six words, students boldly put together their lives. Some wrote about their warmest moments: sharing macaroni and cheese with their grandmother, a perfect summer day, a life-long friendship, a triumphant moment on the football field. Many wrote about heartbreak: a betrayal, a devastating break-up, a hopeless regret, a last moment with a mother or father who was now gone. As the students shed the angsty, apathetic masks they usually wore in class, as they revealed their true, vulnerable inner-selves, your true self was revealed to you and to your students. It was in this moment of honest connection – with students, self, language, and learning – that brought you back to why you teach.

All it took was six words.

As you move forward in your teacher journey, remember this moment. These are the kinds of moments that you teach for: when students realize the magnificent powers of words and stories and knowledge, when students are critical thinkers and communicators, when students are curious, inquisitive and adventurous, when students listen to and collaborate with others, when students strive for and become their best selves. As the days and the years pass, these moments will only become more frequent, which is not to say that they will happen every class period and with every student - and they don't have to. But, when 2nd period has a truly moving whole class discussion, almost entirely on their own, when Ethan emails you an original sonnet he wrote to a friend in the middle of the night, when Paola runs up to you after class to excitedly tell about an epiphany she had about *Romeo and Juliet*, you'll remember these bright hopes compose your core teacher-self. And, remember Katie, these moments can only happen because *you* are their teacher. Never forget.

Love,

Your Future Self
(Katie Hill)

Dear Ms. Hill,

As you see the mold on the walls, broken windows, and flood stained tiles, do not be afraid. Hold your head high. Listen to the words of those who picked you. Your students need a leader in more ways than words can capture. Be that leader for them.

You will have to be creative to thrive. Every possible circumstance will try to push you away from these students, your classroom, this school, and the profession. You **MUST** keep fighting. Fight for what you know is right for you and most importantly what is right for your students. You are here on purpose. Your students are here on purpose.

This is your time, and these are your people. Embrace your students as people, not just students or names on a page. Own them as your tribe, your mission, your family. Your students will become your people. They will inhabit your spirit and your grace. They will mimic you, just like you mimic the practices of your mentor. You are their shepherd. Lead them wisely.

Let me remind you that it is okay to cry. Cry with your mentor, cry with your stuffed animal, cry with your mirror, lesson plans, and journal. Get all of that crying out so that you can process and move forward, but don't cry in front of your students. You need to be strong in their eyes. However, if you need to step out and cry, do it. It will save your soul.

Find a mentor, cultivate the relationship with them. At the end of the day, they will hold you up and keep you going when you feel that you cannot give any more. There is no shame, no shame at all, to rely on the village. Take nuggets of wisdom and record them. Use discernment in everything. Choose your words wisely. Love your students and your colleagues in the ways you want to be loved.

Students will not always know how to express how much they appreciate you. They will say mean things because that's what they know from the world outside of your four walls, but when they yell at you, whisper back in love. Show them grace and love when they least expect it. Take ownership of your students. They need to know that you will go to bat for them on the things that matter the most.

Sometimes parents are intimidating, but they react out of fear and love. At the end of the day, they want the best for their child and your student. Do whatever it takes to get parents on your team. The phone calls, letters, home visits will pay off. Parents want their students to succeed, even if they do not know how to communicate that clearly in the moment. In many ways, they are scared and unsure, just like you. Be there for them and they will often do the same. It's okay to say, "I will get back with you on that." Parents will respect you for your honesty.

When you have a question, ask. It's okay to admit an "oops." Be transparent and keep moving forward. No mistake will define you forever, it never does. People will forget, if you let them. Try everything until something works and even when it does, keep pushing yourself to be stronger, better, more vibrant, and most of all more joyful. Be kind to yourself. Give yourself goals and celebrate the small moments that happen in working to achieve those goals. Those small moment stories will keep you moving. Wear those moments of great success proudly in your crown. When something doesn't go as planned, be honest with yourself and your tribe, pick yourself up, and do something else.

Your ideal first day of school may never happen, but you will get closer and closer each year. You will make it, my friend. Success will come with a bunch of hard work and a little bit of luck.

Do stuff with your students—be silly, make memories. You never know when something you say or do will have a lasting impact. Therefore, chose your words and actions wisely.

The thing that will matter the most is be you. Be who you are in all of your personhood. Let yourself into your professional life like you never have before. Your students, your colleagues, and your tribe needs you, as you, no one else.

Dream big, new teacher, you are right where you need to be.

With love,

Jean (Hill), your future teacher self

To Josh,

Always remember you will fail. You will say the wrong thing. You will do the wrong thing. You will forget what the right thing is sometimes. Through failure you will learn that teaching is not about you. Teaching is about them. Your students; your kids.

You are working against every single bad experience your students have had, and you will learn to view everything through their eyes. Remember what it was like to be them; teenagers haven't changed no matter what the grumpy busy-bodies say.

Understand your insignificance. You are just one of seven teachers your kids see everyday, and just one of many whose classrooms they've passed through. They will not respect you unless you respect them. Many times even then they will not. You have to earn it. You have to be on their side. Value your relationship with them above all else. Students will always remember how you made them feel. They will not always remember the symbolism in that one book they read that one time. Content is secondary to their needs. They will need food. They will need safety. They will need a guide who is there to help them not save them. You are there to teach them how to save themselves.

You will have no clue what to do or say when a discussion about civil disobedience leads to a student confessing that he used to sell drugs to help pay for food for his mother and brother. But you will have to make a decision. Do not waver. Be strong. You will hear worse stories than his.

What I tell you is dark. Know that it will not always be dark and sad. You will know joy beyond what you've experienced thus far. But be prepared. It will never be easy. It will never be about you. It will always be about them.

-Josh (Davis)
June 20, 2017

N. Bunner
Arkansas

Dear First Year Teacher Me,

I know that you think that you are not qualified, but you are. (That masters degree and two undergrad degrees aren't just toilet paper, by golly.) You are an amazing teacher, this is your calling that God has placed on your life. Stop second guessing yourself every day, surround yourself with friends and mentors who can guide you along the way, and never ever give up.

You will hear from your respected principal that you have the makings of a distinguished master teacher and will be so very soon. You will have a sweet student that writes you a heartfelt note thanking you, for touching her life for that short semester you were there and tears will fill your eyes. You will have to clean up a huge mess after a Cinco de Mayo party, but seeing the eager look in your students' eyes when they specifically ask for you to try their food will be payment enough. Take these little blessings as road signs along the way sent from God to assure you of your calling.

You sweet child, you feel everything so keenly. Every disappointment, tiny mistake, bump in the road causes you to rethink your entire life. I adjure you to push forward, ignore these feelings and realize we all make mistakes. Even veteran teachers enter their classroom every day and aren't quite sure what will happen. They make mistakes, learn, and adjust constantly. Remember: "Monitor and adjust" which means constantly fixing, changing, and thriving. When the nature of your profession is learning, you **MUST** fail. If you do not, you will never learn. We are teachers yet, **WE ARE HUMAN**. God is with you wherever you go, don't be afraid.

Love,

Present day Me.

(Natascha Bunner)

June 3, 2017

TO: Jennifer Oramous
Draper Elementary, 2007

Dear First-Day Teacher Self:

Breathe. You are about to experience the first day of the rest of your life. Sure, you spent the last four months in a classroom, but this is different. This is YOUR classroom and YOUR students. You are no longer a placeholder for a teacher who will be returning. You are IT, the teacher!

There will be struggles. First, this group will not want to do as you ask, because the last guy did not teach so much as the kids were allowed to rule the room. Remember, you are the boss now. Remember to be a kind boss, one who loves their employees and gives them choice and agency. One that has the highest of expectations for all, and yes, I mean all. Remember they can all learn, it is up to you to find the way that is best for each of them.

You can do this. There will be rough spots. You will get tired, frustrated, and overwhelmed, but hang in there. Because you will also experience joy, love and pride beyond compare. In all the ups and downs, look to your students. They will always be the bright spot that keeps you going. The reason you get up early, the reason you constantly search for the next big idea, the reason you will be held in high esteem. They are the ones who do the work that makes you better and makes you want to be better.

This day is the beginning of a journey and, as they say, the longest journey starts with a single step. And for us, it is a step into the classroom at Draper Middle School to face a group of sixth graders who will challenge us and help us grow, just as we will help them grow. And spoiler alert! You will make it.

You will be shaky at first, though you will never let the kids see you sweat. You will quickly find your sea legs and confidence and you will be AMAZING. The rough spots will be rough, but stick with it. Teaching is what you are built to do. It is your passion which will fuel your days long into the future. It will drive your teaching and your own education. It will lead you to many great things. It will take you places you have not dreamed of and some that you have, but thought impossible. Teaching will give you a meaningful connection to the world, allowing you to be the difference you want to see in the world.

A few things to remember: HAVE FUN! Over-plan, but don't rush to just get through everything. Give the students and yourself time; time to be kids, time to work, time to share, time to talk. Always look for the next great idea. Never give up, even when something flops or completely crashes and burns. You will have bad days, but the good ones will far outweigh the bad. Always revel in that spark of understanding in your students' eyes. Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh. Be human, make mistakes and apologize when necessary. Play. Dance. Be crazy.

One day you will discover a tie-dyed lab coat. Wear it...everyday whether you have a lab or not. Add pins to it of all your passions. Show that passion to your students and the world. And even when you switch to teaching education classes, keep it just in case.

As you move through your career, you will change grade levels. The kids will eventually turn into young and young-at-heart adults, but don't change the way you teach. All people want a teacher who is engaging and encouraging and constantly growing and searching for the best way to teach.

This first day will be scary. The first semester will have challenges that you don't think you can overcome. But you can. This is the first day of the rest of your life. This is what you were born to do. Step into that classroom and into the future with confidence. It is going to be grand!

Sincerely,
Jennifer Oramous

Dear Allison,

I know you are tired. Tired from planning every minute of every lesson from the moment you got home to the moment you need to go to bed. Tired from the play practice that lasted until 5:30 on a day when you taught without a prep. Tired of having to say, "I can't kayak this weekend" or "I can't do(whatever)" because you have 150 new essays to grade. You're tired of seeing posts of your friends finishing their last years of college and playing cards while you lay on the floor in front of two or three open textbooks while trying to decide how to interest a room full of eleventh graders who would rather "watch the movie." This feeling will go away. You are feeling this because you care about doing a good job. You care about reaching students and having good relationships with your coworkers, administrators, family, friends, and community. People can see that. Your students may not remember that time you tried to teach them reading strategies using kids books, but they will remember the way you listened. They will remember that you told them they could be successful even if they thought they just "weren't good at English." They will reach out to you, years later, for advice for themselves and for their parents. They will thank you for making each day fun in speeches at graduation. They will notice when you respect and value your coworkers and delight in it. So, continue to take the time to plan for your students. Remember that there are worse things than having five minutes left at the end of class and even if you do run out of things to say student's futures will not be lost (just don't make it a habit, ok?). So, go eat lunch in another teacher's room, help with plays, and go see your students participate in extracurricular activities. Remember that the best planned lesson can go awry and trust yourself. Keep reaching out to those whose opinions you value and be sure to do the same for those who value your opinion. Feeling tired is ok, just remember to wake up and keep doing what you're doing. Your students and your coworkers will remember you for it.

Allison Evans

Dear Ms. Allen,

You are now the adult in the room. It doesn't matter that you just graduated college and still go home on the weekends to eat your mother's leftovers. You. Are. It. They will say "yes ma'am," and they will respect you - but only because you know the importance of earning that respect, not demanding it.

You'll have a girl in third hour say that she "f*cking hates English" out loud because she made a 0/100 on her paper (that she did not turn in), but instead of being mad, you lean down and tell her to "get it all out of your system, sister. I know you're not mad at me, or at English, but instead at yourself." She will be shocked, agree with you, and from that day forward write, "I love you Ms. Allen. You are my favorite" on your board every day.

You will have a girl in fourth hour who tells you to your face that she wishes that you would choke on a chip. But instead of sending her to the office, you will call her to talk after class and find out that she is being bullied herself and really does love you. Let it be a reminder that every single human being in "your" room is going through something.

That is another thing, "your" room is not your own. Sure, you will decorate it and you will water your plants and you will call it "home," but so will they. They that fear the lunchroom. They that need the solitude and the safe place to stay. They, those little angsty toots, with attitudes that could melt a new teacher without a backbone. But you have one, you know it, they know it, and I promise at the end of the year they will be just as sad to leave you as you are reading their goodbye letters because you have stood your ground and made an effort to love everyone in a tough-love (challenge them all) kind of way.

Here is some advice: Make more lesson plans. Don't "wing it" as much. Teach everyday with 100% passion, compassion, effort, and attitude. Your students will feed off of you, good and bad. Eat breakfast and drink your coffee - your kids will know if you haven't because you get a little cranky. Lead by example - they are always watching.

Above Shakespeare and Gatsby, teach your students that you simply love them. Remember that not every student will love to write (like you did), but every student will love to feel loved.

Ms. Allen (year two)
(Payton Allen)

Dear Ms. Ballenger,

Remember no matter how stressful, overwhelming, and nerve-racking things may seem, your strengths will carry you through. At first you may feel intimidated and unsure of your place. That is okay. You will learn how everyone, no matter how small their role may seem in the big scheme of things, plays a critical role. You are no exception to this. Take a deep breath and ask for help when you are unsure.

Always remember not to compare yourself with others, even the newbies like you. Everyone brings something different to the table and is on their personal trajectory. Instead, use your colleagues as resources and for support. Teaching will always (and should always!) extend beyond the classroom.

Your to do list may frequently seem insurmountable. Take that deep breath again and go one babystep at a time. Dedication, perseverance, and a willingness to apply new strategies will take you far. Stay positive. Even in the most chaotic and dismal situations there is always a bright spot.

The future may seem uncertain, but you are one to commit and put your mind to it. Remember how growing in this profession doesn't mean you have flaws but rather are taking the opportunity to grow in your craft. Consider always climbing a mountain as metaphor. You will never reach the top, but that is not your goal. Your mission is to keep stopping along the way, grabbing those tools, checking in with the tour guides, and most importantly sharing those tools with your kids. They may not appreciate it now, but they certainly will in the years to come. Viewing improvement through this lens will help you become wiser.

Keep in mind your students will view you as you view yourself. Show your passion for literacy, and give them the opportunity to find this passion in their own time. Although you have plenty of energy about you, remember to add a little tranquility to your classroom. This can always be achieved by dimming the lights or putting on soothing music. When you are calm and composed your students will be more at peace.

Don't ever be afraid to be firm and direct. Yes, it takes courages, uses up energy, and can make you feel drained. But in the long run it's far less exhausting to follow this path. Remember to let the little things go. Have faith in yourself. Realize no matter how fixated or OCD you can be, you can always monitor and adjust. Sometimes this will come at unexpected moments, but that's all a part of the journey.

Lastly, keep in mind the phrase "once my student, always my student." Make sure the kids know this as well. There isn't a magic switch that turns off at the end of the year where they are no longer yours to help, to use you as a resource, or share their journey with. You will always make an impact, no matter how small it will seem.

Love,
Victoria (Ballenger)

Dear Ms.Coughlin-Year 1,

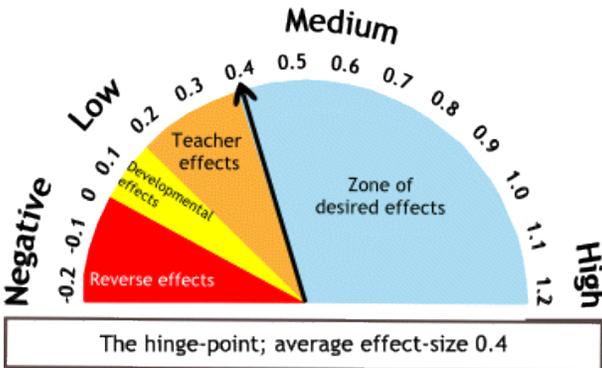
You've taken a teaching job, not your dream job, but a job nonetheless. You are stepping into a role that you have never taken before, a special education career. You are going to start between schools, and then be moved nine weeks in. It's okay. They aren't doing this because they do not think that you are capable of the job that you are doing, they are doing it so that you can provide the help to students in a different school that do not have the access at this time. Your caseload of students is going to be six students too many by the time the last day rolls around. It's okay. All of this is going to help you become more diverse in your teaching experiences and provide you with knowledge of paperwork and meetings that your college years did not prepare you for.

You are going to come across students with varying ability levels, both emotionally and academically. You are going to provide those tough, hard to reach students with strategies that help make them successful. Special education isn't going to be easy, and sometimes not as rewarding as you desire it to be. But you are going to learn. You are going to learn about your students, and what it takes for them to be successful. You are going to learn that success cannot be the same for every student, they all need something different. You are going to try things that you never thought could be used in a classroom, some of them are going to work and some of them are not. You are going to learn as you go, from your students and from your colleagues.

You are going to feel alone in your world of Special Education. There isn't going to be anyone else doing the same thing as you in the building, but you're going to learn. You are going to make friends with others that are feeling the same way as you. You are going to learn from them and with them as the days are crossed off of the calendar. You are going to make lifelong friends that care about your success in the classroom and outside of it.

This year will be filled with many feelings of success as well as those full of tears, but you're going to get through it. You're going to keep going, and you will get to keep touching students' lives, as they touch yours. Don't give up on yourself, there's always a little rain before the rainbow.

From,
Ms.Coughlin-Year 3

August		Mapping Out the School Year
		
Teacher Checklist		
Community (Relationships & Environment)	Curriculum & Instruction	Assessment & Record Keeping
<p>Build Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers & Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-Students (Teacher-Student Relationships $d=0.72$, Teacher Credibility $d=0.90$) <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher-Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Students-Students <p>Environment <i>(Before School Starts)</i></p> <p>Classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create a classroom map (furniture and paths of movement) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Walk & troubleshoot the paths of movement <input type="checkbox"/> Determine Classroom Routines <input type="checkbox"/> Determine Behavior Management System (Classroom Management $d=0.52$) <p>Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Learn procedures & routines for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student arrival & departure <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch & recess <input type="checkbox"/> Hallway & bathroom <p>Schedule <i>(Before School Starts)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Locate your class times on the master schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Create your class schedule 	<p>Curriculum <i>(Before School Starts)</i></p> <p>Your goal is to know where to locate these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> District curriculum resources <input type="checkbox"/> School curriculum resources <p>Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teach Routines <input type="checkbox"/> Teach Speaking & Listening standard 1 (Classroom Discussion $d=0.82$) <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce some cooperative learning strategies with content neutral topics (Cooperative versus Individualistic Learning $d=0.59$) <input type="checkbox"/> Use pacing guides and unit plans to plan lessons and begin teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Use your academic facilitators as resources 	<p>State Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Learn which <i>state</i> level beginning of the year assessments you are required to administer <input type="checkbox"/> Learn HOW to administer them (see your assistant principal) <p>District Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Learn which <i>district</i> level beginning of the year assessments you are required to administer <input type="checkbox"/> Learn HOW to administer them (see your assistant principal) <p>School Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Check to see if your school requires any additional beginning of the year assessments <p>Record Keeping <i>(Before School Starts)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a system for recording and organizing assessment data <p>Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Familiarize yourself with progress reports and the report card
 <p>The hinge-point; average effect-size 0.4</p>		

Appendix E: Articles about Early-Career Teachers and Teacher Attrition

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Appendix F: Why I Stay

Tyler: Why I Stay

It seems that the teaching profession is becoming more and more devalued every day. The news is constantly filled with stories of failing schools or “miracle fixes” that will solve all of the problems in education if they are implemented. The common narrative in our culture is that teaching is something easy you can do if you don’t get a job elsewhere. When, as a real teacher, if you share the discontent or stress you feel in your profession, one of your aunts or cousins will probably say something like, “Well, if I were a teacher, I’d just make it fun so the kids wouldn’t get bored.”

I believe that this is one of the core reasons that teachers leave the profession. Similar stress levels, workloads, and top-down mandates surely exist in other professions as well, but those factors combined with the fact that our profession is not highly valued creates a toxic mix in many early-career teachers’ lives.

I stay in teaching for two main reasons. First, the kids keep me coming back. Sometimes (many times) they get on my nerves, as seventh graders will do to anyone who spends much time around them. But, for many of them, their future livelihood, their social and intellectual development, and their overall well-being depend on the adults in their lives at school. I hope that I can make some small impact on even one student each day that will nudge them toward a track to a better future and a better life.

The second reason is that I have found a place that I feel valued. I love my school - I have amazing colleagues, passionate leadership, and a supportive learning community.

Amanda: Why I Stay

Why would I stay in teaching when leaving is just as easy of an option? If only that was an easy one word answer.

First and foremost, I stay for the kids. There is no greater feeling than the one where you get to see a student read for the first time, solve the math problem they have been stuck on for weeks, or finally pick up that pencil and write—not because they have to, but because they want to. Every student that walks through my classroom door, our classroom door, becomes part of my family. They become my kids. I have to opportunity to spend eight hours with these children every day, more than double what many of them see of their parents. I want to make every moment count. Maybe every minute isn’t filled with academics, but I want them to know that they are cared about and they are loved as soon as they walk through the door.

I stay because I want to make the difference. I may not reach every student or every colleague, but I can sure try. Teachers have made some of the biggest impacts on my life, and I want to pay it forward. I want to be someone that when a student looks back on their academic career they can reflect and understand that what we were doing in the classroom that day, it

made a difference. I want what we are doing in the classroom to help my students achieve their goals and dreams, because they are helping me live mine.

Why do I stay in teaching? Because to me, there isn't anything better than this option.

Anne-Elise: Why I Stay

I stay to inspire, encourage, evolve

To connect, collaborate, create

I stay to teach compassion, empathy, understanding

To show determination, dedication, doggedness

I stay to grow in knowledge and depth and experience

To root myself and be uprooted in the work that needs to be done

I stay to challenge and be challenged

To set the course and steer from it

Following trails set before me and blazing new ones

I stay to reinvigorate my soul

Recharged with each new student I encounter

I stay to prove to myself and others that this is necessary, vital, life-giving work

To provide a safe harbor for the weary and weathered-down

I stay to learn and linger in the mystery that is the human mind

To open up to the possibilities of tomorrow and learn from the pitfalls of today

I stay to make anew each dawn, to be a light to the path

So that maybe when my students walk down that path

They may be awakened to their own light and illumine the potential within

I stay so that one day they may stay, too

Vicki: Why I Stay

When work gets hard and wears me down, I think of the reason I am here. I see in my mind the pebble in the pond, tiny ripples extending outward into bigger and bigger circles. I, like the pebble, am breaking the surface. I, like the pebble, am making a change. It is a change that will have far-reaching consequences. I teach.

Over 30% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. That is disheartening, but there are many reasons for this exodus. Teaching is hard. The hours of preparation and grading extend far beyond the “school day.” Teaching doesn’t pay much. There is a lot of pressure from high-stakes testing and evaluation. The rules change every year. And many teachers don’t have the autonomy they were expecting. Teaching is hard, but it is worth it.

Every day, when I walk into the school, the students’ energy energizes me. They are full of life as the day begins. I watch them walking into the building, engaged in animated discussion, purposefully bumping into one another, jostling for position and inclusion. As a teacher, I can channel that energy and enthusiasm. Humans are natural learners, if teachers don’t beat it out of them. As I productively channel their energy, designing and organizing activities, I hope to give them tools for thinking and learning that will empower them throughout their lives. They, in turn, will touch others, hopefully in ways that encourage further thinking and learning.

When the work gets hard and wears me down, I think of my students, the world they will enter, and the impact that I hope they will have for good in that world. The big ideas, the concepts and skills that remain with them after they leave my classroom, are the changes I hope to make in the world, ripple by ripple. I teach.

Jean: Why I Stay

Teachers leave the profession for many reasons including lack of quality resources, including but not limited to physical resources, mentors, ideas, networks, partnerships, and support. A lack of a positive climate and value also contributes to the high rate of teachers leaving the profession with the first five years. The list could go on. So much keeps teachers from continuing, but why stay?

People ask me all the time why I have stayed—in education, youth development, social work—all the professions that influence the role of a teacher on a daily basis. I stay for the students, who become so much more than students. My students become my tribe, my impact, my destiny. Even though they challenge me in more ways than I can imagine, they have my back in times of great need. I stay for the people they will become someday.

I stay in teaching to grow. I find opportunity where others see none. I am valued. I contribute, network, learn alongside my students and colleagues daily. I feel like I have an impact after hours,

days, weeks, months, and years of hard work. I grow. I grow with the seasons, the changing trends in education, the revolving door of the profession (at this time...hopefully not forever). I am a lifelong learner, and teaching fulfills my need for continual access to people, resources, networks, and ideas that allow me to constantly pursue knowledge and sustain my need for wisdom.

I teach because my heroes did. My mentors did and some still do. I teach because it is in my blood. I teach because I have been preparing for this moment for a lifetime, through all of my educational and professional opportunities, even when I was trying to do exactly the opposite. I teach because I have a home, a village a tribe. I teach because this is where I belong.

Ultimately I teach to cultivate leaders for the future who will change the world. My hope in teaching is that I can teach a little about the content or subject matter I share and a lot about what it means to love deeply, understand and tackle social problems, be a good person, and be authentic in a world that constantly attempts to shape us into people we are not. I teach for change. I hope you do too.

Katie: Why I Stay

I think so many leave the teaching profession due to the sense of isolation they experience. Individuals need to feel connection to something larger than themselves; furthermore, individuals need to feel like they are contributing something valuable to that larger entity. Oftentimes, newer teachers feel disconnected from their communities: their schools, their towns, their professional networks, and sometimes even their own classrooms. The constant pressures and overwhelming amount of challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis also disconnects them from who they are as a teacher, or as a person. When teachers no longer feel like they are fulfilled or are fulfilling a role in their community, they leave to find connection elsewhere.

But, when teachers finally find (if they ever do), someone, somewhere, or some way to leave their islands, to join something larger than themselves, to put down roots, that is when they stay, that is when they grow. It's why I stayed. As an old professor of mine once said about that key to staying in education: "Anybody that says they can do it alone is fooling themselves...I've been fortunate to have people to talk to, and fortunately, they listened." So if anything, new teachers need to find someone who will listen, find somewhere that will support their journey, find some way to join a tribe, to find – above all – connection.

Josh: Why I Stay

Over thirty percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years due to a variety of reasons. Although there are exceptions, many of these reasons can be combined into three categories: lack of authentic mentorship, lack of resources, and negative school climate. I feel very fortunate to not have experienced these reasons. I was hired directly from my program, where I had supportive professors and mentors, to a large high school within a large district. My classroom was enriched with technology, and the school has a positive, supportive climate which

emphasizes relationships with students over hard-nosed curriculum. I have ample autonomy within my instruction and the necessary physical resources to be creative within reason. These opportunities afforded me the ability to focus my energy into connecting and enjoying my students. Let me be clear: this is not bragging. This is not ego. I am only able to feel this confident in my pedagogy because of the supports in place by my teacher preparation program (MAT at the University of Arkansas), my district, and most importantly my school.

Lauren: Why I Teach (beginning her 1st year of teaching)

Based on the conversations we've had during the #StayinTeaching Summer Retreat, I believe teachers leave the profession so soon because they aren't given adequate support. Support for early career teachers can come from many individuals, but it's crucial that teachers feel supported by their administrators and their fellow teachers. When this support is lacking in a school it often creates a negative school climate. A teacher's performance is directly influenced by the climate that surrounds them. Therefore, if they're surrounded by a negative climate where they don't feel their work or their ideas are valued, they're likely to attribute these feelings to the profession rather than simply their school.

I pursued the profession of teaching based on the interactions I had with my high school teachers and my college professors. Although not all of my teachers modeled what I wanted to be as an educator, they all influenced my decision to become a teacher. As a student, I loved participating in a class discussion about a book or an event that I had developed a passion for by studying it in class, so eventually I decided I wanted to be the one that facilitates that kind of passion-driven learning.

I also love teenagers. I love the moldability of their minds. I love their unpredictability. Getting to be around teenagers all day and being a positive, stable adult in their lives is a key motivation for me as a secondary educator. I want to show students that reading and writing are not only vital skills that will help them in their future endeavors, but they're also practices that can benefit their everyday life. I love introducing a young person to a book series or an author that they can't stop reading, or watching a student's writing project turn into a common practice.

The first day of school is the most exciting day of the year. It's a fresh start. It's a blank page. And now I get to have a first day of school every year from here on out!

Johnny: Why I Stay

There will be many reasons to walk out the door. "I didn't become a teacher to teach students how to take a test," you'll say. "It's too political." "I don't earn enough to provide for my family." "I feel like I'm not able to teach what I want in the way I want." These concerns are valid, and they are all things I said when I walked out the door. I taught high school English for four years, so I fall into the growing percentage of teachers who leave the classroom within their first five years of teaching. So why am I writing this essay trying to convince you to stick with teaching?

Because I've felt the thrill of guiding young learners, of interacting with great kids and colleagues, and of being a part of something much bigger than myself.

Actually, I haven't fully left teaching. I'm getting a graduate degree in education with the goal of training future teachers. There's something really special about being in a classroom with young learners, introducing new ideas to them, and then struggling together to explore our thoughts and come to some sort of understanding as a group. When teachers say they love to see the "light come on in a student's mind," they mean it. And it is a real thing.

Good schools and good teachers build each other up, help each other, look out for each other. There are many who would say that public education is failing, but my experience has been that teachers, administration, and involved parents are hard-working people who love children and who work tirelessly on their behalf. As a teacher, you will work with some of the best people in the world—I truly believe that.

And as a teacher, you are working in a world that is much greater than yourself. When you're stuck in the middle of test prep or monitoring assemblies, it can be hard to remember that. But if you take a step back, you will recognize that a career in education gives you daily blessings that you'll always remember. You'll help a kid begin to believe in herself. You'll steer a kid away from drugs or violence. You'll embrace someone you taught 15 years ago just because you were an adult who treated him with respect. And you'll teach English, or math, or science along the way. So I am asking you to not walk out that door. Take a breath, a drink, or a long weekend, and remember why you started this in the first place. Because you love kids and you want to help them find themselves. That's just what teachers do.

Appendix G: Emails and Agendas for Mentoring Program

Kick-Off Meeting Mentoring Model Overview

At the mentoring kick-off, which occurred at the conclusion of the Fall into Teaching event, we discussed expectations for mentoring and reviewed the Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model for Mentoring and Coaching (Collet, 2012), considering how the model might guide the unique mentoring opportunity we were envisioning. We specifically focused on modeling and how this phase in the mentoring cycle might look with remote mentoring. The handout provided to mentors is below.

**One Size
Does Not Fit All**

**Accept that we are not all in
the same place, and we don't
all grow at the same rate . . .
just like our students.**

Terry Thompson,
choiceliteracy.com

Shared Assumptions

- We can separate the teaching from the teacher
- Practice is something that can be changed, not an indelible part of a teacher's personality
- Professionals have a common body of knowledge and practices
 - Differences are not simply a matter of "style"
 - Characterizing differences as matters of taste or style trivializes teachers' practice

Mentoring Changes Over Time

- Increase effectiveness by recognizing mentees' varying experience and expertise
- Increase effectiveness by acknowledging mentees' increasing expertise

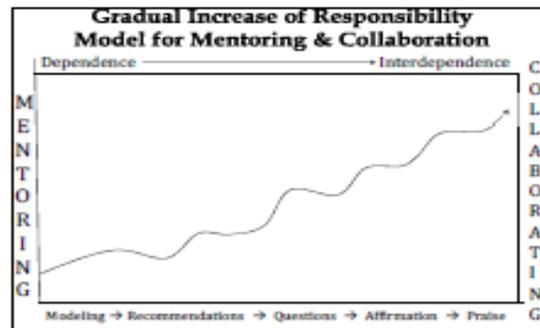
**Gradual Increase of
Responsibility (G.I.R.)**

- Mentor provides scaffolding which is continuously adjusted to meet needs of mentee & students s/he is instructing.
- Interactions with mentor support mentees increasing expertise and experience in planning and providing instruction
- Quantity and quality of support changes over time

**Gradual Increase of
Responsibility
(G.I.R.)**

Interfaces the GRR model on mentoring

- Modeling
- Recommendations
- Questions
- Affirmation
- Praise



Modeling

- Outside the classroom: demonstrations, video clips, etc.
- In the classroom

We all learn as we go by reflecting on successes and less-successful aspects of the lesson

Modeling

- Mentors may also model "expert thinking and problem-solving processes."

Costa & Garmston, 2002

Collet, V. S. (2012). The Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model: Coaching for teacher change. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 51*(1), 27-47.

First email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

In addition to our monthly Google Hangouts (Oct. 12, Nov. 9, & Dec. 7, 4-5 pm), I'll be sending a weekly email with thoughts about mentoring. I'll also add you to the listserv for my blog, <http://mycoachescouch.blogspot.com>; although it's addressed to coaches, most of the ideas apply to mentors as well. Feel free to judiciously "reply all" with thoughts pertinent to our mentoring group throughout this experience.

This week's email is a link about being irresistible! It's targeted to business people, but you'll readily see the connection to mentoring:

<http://www3.forbes.com/entrepreneurs/11-secrets-of-irresistible-people>

Consider how your interactions with your mentee will build a relationship of trust - the foundation of successful mentoring work.

Happy Mentoring!

Second email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

Below are a few tips for new teachers. Think about which of these might be useful for your mentee and how you could facilitate it.

- Identify 1 or 2 specific, achievable teaching goals.
- Schedule regular, goal-oriented meetings
- Keep a journal of classroom issues
- Invite the mentor into the classroom whenever possible
- Ask for immediate feedback after observations
- Observe other teachers' classrooms

Before you delete this email, I challenge you to send one to your mentee!

Thanks for learning with us about mentoring!

Third email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

Do you have recommendations to make to your new teacher friend? That's probably just what your mentee needs at this point in the year (remember the GIR mentoring model with phases – model/recommend/question/affirm/praise). Making recommendations can be very helpful – or very overwhelming. Check out this old blog post for some insight I gained about making recommendations:

<http://mycoachescouch.blogspot.com/2013/02/whats-in-your-backpack.html>

And here's a little humor and insight you can share with your mentee if they are wondering what the chaos they are living is creating:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL7Y6S4dMjl>

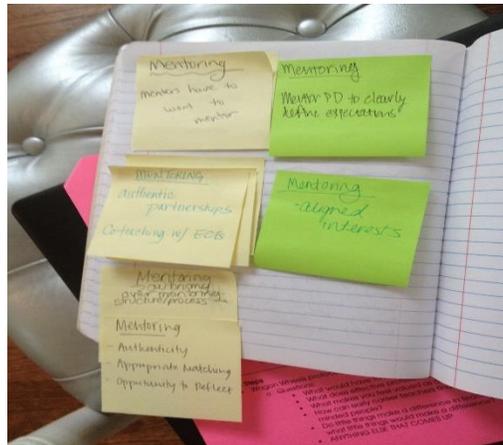
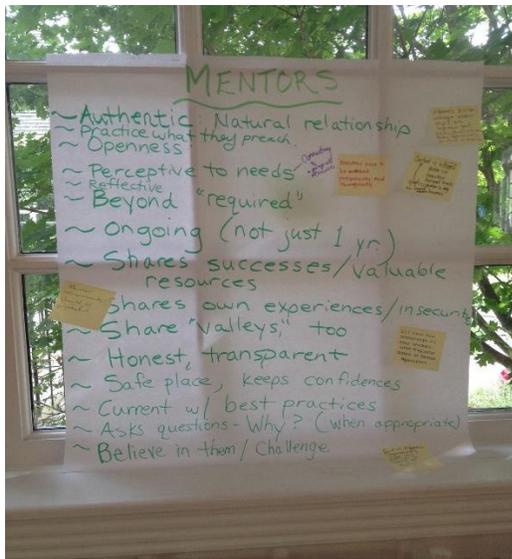
The video is about a parent, but I think the same thing applies to teachers with students of all ages!

Note: Take care of yourself so you can be a great mentor!

Fourth email to mentors

Dear Writing Project Mentors,

This summer, some amazing early-career teachers got together to do some problem-solving. One of the topics they tackled was mentoring. Below, you'll find two photos I took that capture their thinking. I think you'll find their ideas helpful.



Looking forward to our Google Hangout on Thursday, Oct. 12. Details about joining will be included in next week's email.

Thanks for the support you are providing! You are making a difference one by one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-aVMdJ3Aok>

Fifth email to mentors

Dear Writing Project Mentors

I'm looking forward to our first Writing Project Mentor Meeting, which will be this Thursday, Oct. 12 from 4 – 5 pm. We will be meeting via Google Hangout at this link:

https://hangouts.google.com/hangouts/_/nazclkyuvaunitxz4yg3fry3ie

Please plan to join from a computer (Chromebook or iPad is fine – just some larger device, since we will be looking at documents as well as each other ☺). If you haven't used Google Hangout before, please share the above link with a friend in advance (not the day of, as this seems to sometimes cause problems) and make sure everything works properly from the computer you will be using to join our meeting. Use Chrome for the best sign-in experience.

If you run into problems, you can find tips here:

<https://support.google.com/a/answer/4362302?hl=en>

Usually it's as simple as clicking on the link, I'm just being cautious since I want everyone to be able to participate.

Please come to our meeting prepared with:

- A celebration
- A concern
- A question

Here's a little food for thought between now and then:

<https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/articles/7-traits-great-mentor/>

Looking forward to seeing you all on Thursday!

Note: During the Google Hangout, mentors came prepared with a celebration, a concern, and a question. We problem-solved together and shared resources.

Sixth email to mentors

Dear Writing Project Mentors,

It was great to connect with you last week, almost face-to-face. One thing that was loud and clear was that your mentees (like you!) are busy ladies. So what can you do to help your busy teacher friend? Ask the question:

What are you doing for your students that they can (and should) be doing for themselves?

For example, is your mentee creating a handout for two-column notes for that upcoming book analysis, formatting it, adding clip art, going to the copy room, printing and collating, and finally distributing that handout to students? Instead, could she turn on the doc cam and model how to set up the page in students' reader's notebook?

That's just one example. I'm sure you can think of MANY others. If you think of one, please "reply all" so that we have a good stockpile of examples to share.

As with all questions, we have to think about how we couch the comment so that it feels helpful instead of accusatory (we never mean it to sound that way, but sometimes it does!).

Here's a related article from a parenting perspective (food for thought):

<https://familyshare.com/19747/why-you-shouldnt-do-for-kids-what-they-can-do-for-themselves>

Thanks for mentoring!

Seventh email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

As you've gotten to know your mentees, I bet you've reflected a time or two on your first year of teaching. Here's a video of some teachers reminiscing in "Letter to My First Day Teacher Self":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miPYLJI247g&t=109s>

Take a moment to read a letter or two written by our own Northwest Arkansas Writing Project colleagues here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B2Tnn4KqOgnNN3lwMFhXeU8tX2M?usp=sharing>

As you read these reflections, I hope you'll glean some ideas for supporting your mentee. If you think of something you're going to try, don't be afraid to be the first one to "reply all"! I'd love to keep this mentor community connected.

Please let me know if you are having trouble connecting with your mentee. Hoping for the success of all as you figure out what **support** looks like for your new friend!

Eighth email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

I hope you are finding opportunities to connect with your mentees and build their confidence! Marcus Garvey is quoted as saying, "With confidence, you have won before you have started." Certainly the opposite is true. And we know that confidence is one thing that first-year teachers are often lacking by this time of year, even if they started the year for optimism!

Confidence is related to self-efficacy - the belief that what we are doing makes a difference. And self-efficacy is directly correlated with student achievement. So, follow that line of reasoning, and it seems that if we can find ways to increase our mentees confidence, we'll also have a positive impact on their students' learning.

Beginning teachers have identified 5 Be's of effective mentors. As you read over them, do a mental checklist about how you are measuring up with your early-career teacher friend:

- 1) Be approachable, accessible, and willing to be engaged;
- 2) Be supportive
- 3) Be understanding
- 4) Be a good communicator; provide honest feedback
- 5) Be knowledgeable and experienced about pedagogy



If there is a "Be" to be worked on, pause for 20 seconds and think about what you can do in that area this week.....(pause).....

Make sure your calendars are marked for our next virtual meeting on Thursday, Nov. 9 at 4 pm. Details will be in next week's email.

Happy Mentoring!

Ninth email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

Some of our #StayinTeaching group (including some of you and your mentees) have been reading *Thrive*, by Meenoo Rami. In this video, Meenoo succinctly shares the wisdom of leaders in our field. I'm sure at least one of the comments will resonate for you and your mentee:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxVnK0z0G7w>

The comment that stood out to me was her own wisdom: "Our work is challenging enough; let's not do it alone." Encouraging and supporting collaboration is a sure way to lighten your mentee's load.

I also I love Meenoo's "light bulb moment" video, where she proclaims, "Your actions make you a leader" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4M9xPnoc5g>). Thank you for taking a leadership role as #StayinTeaching mentors!

I look forward to seeing you at our Google Hangout mentor meeting this week. You should have received an invitation that included the video link; you should also be able to access the hangout here:

https://hangouts.google.com/hangouts/_/calendar/dnNjb2xsZXRAZ21haWwuY29t.2eiuop3939su6ek70o2iuv7vjm

See you at 4 pm Thursday!

Note: At the November mentoring Google Hangout, mentors shared celebrations and concerns and discussed the question: When has *asking questions* (the 3rd move in the GIR model) been a helpful mentoring or coaching move for you?

Tenth email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

I appreciated the chance to talk with you last Thursday (apologies for missing Karen's email cry for help with tech – she would have been with us, too).

Reviewing my notes from our conversation, the theme of *listening* stood out. We know listening is an important part of mentoring. It reminded me of a blog post a few years ago:

<http://mycoachescouch.blogspot.com/2014/05/hear-you-i-do.html>

I encourage you, in your conversations with your mentee (whether audio or digital) to peel back the layers so that you can get to the message your teacher friend is sending. It's wonderful if that takes place in the moment, but it may require some reflecting after the fact. Whether soon or late, I'm confident that your first-year teacher friend will appreciate being heard.



What will you do to listen better to your mentee? (Pause....pause.....pause) If you've thought of something, please "reply all" and share! Then go forth and do. In the wise words of Yoda: "Do. Or do not. There is no try."

Eleventh email to mentors

Dear #StayinTeaching Mentors,

I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving! No matter how much your mentees love their jobs, I'm sure they really appreciated the break! Hopefully they are recharged and ready to push through to Christmas. After that, they can breathe a sigh of relief and know that their first year of teaching is half over, and never to be repeated!

Classroom management has been a common thread as we've talked about mentee concerns, so I thought I'd share some resources on this topic.

First, a couple of videos from Teaching Channel. This first one is short and sends a positive, hopeful message about classroom management. Send a text with the link, and your mentee will have a boost for the day!

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teach-kids-nea>

Warning – the next one is long and sometimes boring! There are some good tips in here, but unfortunately, the pace of the video is *s-l-o-w* (especially the narrator), and it lasts 11 minutes! That's probably about eight minutes more than your mentees will want to watch. If you could

preview and point them to a couple of places in the video that they should check out (based on your previous conversations with them), they'd probably appreciate it!

For yourself, you might consider both the coach's and mentor's approach in this video. What do you think works in their conversations? What would you change? (And if you happen to want to "reply all" and share your thinking, we could all extend our own learning!).

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/new-teacher-classroom-management>

There are some other helpful tips from the Teaching Channel New Teacher Survival Guide. Cull the ones that seem most applicable for your mentee and share:

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/new-teacher/small-strategies-big-impact>

Next, a book suggestion:

Some of you are mentoring elementary teachers. The Book, [*No More Taking Away Recess*](#), is the best little guide I've ever read on classroom management for elementary teachers. It is short, research-based, and practical. I've literally seen this book work miracles for pre-service teachers, and I think it could do the same for many first-year teachers as well. Geared toward K-5 teachers, much of the content would be applicable at higher grade levels.

Finally, consider your own learning experience about classroom management. For me, the message sent by our vice-principal just before my second year of teaching middle school made all the difference. Three little words to guide my classroom management: Firm, Fair, and Friendly. What was it that made the nickel drop for you? Who or what helped you get a grip on classroom management? (Again, don't resist the urge to "reply all" should it hit you!)

Thanks for all you are doing to help your mentee #StayinTeaching!

Twelfth email to mentors

Dear StayinTeaching Mentors,

Remember the GIR model for mentoring? As the mentoring process moves forward, asking questions becomes more and more important. That's because when mentors ask questions, it helps to cultivate self-reflection, a practice our mentees will use after we are gone.

Here's a blog emphasizing self-reflection that includes some questions we can steal as mentors:

<https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/10-self-reflective-questions-teachers>

I like the emphasis on reflection to cultivate positive attitude. This is so important during the stressful first year! And the questions suggested are a nice blend of looking at the positive and considering areas for growth.

CHALLENGE: Ask your mentee one of these questions (or a variation of it) this week. You can ask in a text, Tweet, email, phone call, or face-to-face conversation. During our Google Hangout **this Thursday at 4 pm**, we'll discuss which question you asked and what the response was (among other things).

Speaking of the **Google Hangout this Thursday**, I sent everyone a Google calendar invite. You can join using the link in the invitation:

https://hangouts.google.com/hangouts/_/calendar/dnNjb2xsZXRAZ21haWwuY29t.4vrmucll6ar5usp0g5dvotel0u

I promise to check my email during the event to see if anyone is having problems getting on! During the conversation, we will also make plans for a concluding face-to-face mentor/mentee get-together in January.

Looking forward to talking with you then!

Note: At the mentoring Google Hangout, mentors first completed the Google form about a question they asked their mentee (see above). We then went through question by question, discussing why they chose that question and what the response was. We also planned the January mentor/mentee reunion.

Thirteenth email to mentors

What is a **mentor**? Here's the definition, according to



noun men·tor \ 'men-,tôr , -tər \

a **trusted** counselor or guide; tutor; coach; someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person; a wise and faithful adviser or teacher.

More from Merriam-Webster: "We acquired 'mentor' from the literature of ancient Greece. In Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, Odysseus was away from home fighting and journeying for 20 years. During that time, Telemachus, the son he left as a babe in arms, grew up under the supervision of Mentor, **an old and trusted friend**. When the goddess Athena decided it was time to

complete the education of young Telemachus, she visited him disguised as Mentor **and they set out together to learn** about his father. Today, we use the word mentor for anyone who is a positive, guiding influence in another (usually younger) person's life."

And here are some **synonyms** for the verb form of the word:

coach, counsel, lead, guide, instruct, edify, educate, explain, pilot, shepherd, show, tutor, teach, steer, direct, foster, nurture, aid, champion, help, sponsor.

Pause for a moment a review that list. Which of these have you enacted in your role as a #StayinTeaching mentor? Who else have you mentored in these ways? As your official role as #StayinTeaching mentor comes to a close, you'll carry your experiences with you and help others #StayinTeaching. Supporting colleagues along their teaching path is one way we give back to the profession. **Thank you for being givers!**

As we discussed during our Hangout last week, we will have a mentor/mentee celebration in January. On the Doodle form (link below), please indicate ALL OF THE TIMES you are available for our final celebration! Dinner will be provided, along with a goody-bag of freebies, a book, and enriching conversation!

<https://doodle.com/poll/zwpy4x4yu7t4k2vp>

Thanks for your suggestions for our ending celebration. We'll include a "Who Are the Other Mentors in Your Life" activity and a "Letter to Self" that mentees can open at the end of the school year. You will also write a letter to them that I'll mail in March.

Happy holidays to each of you! I hope you have time to enjoy the small delights of the season!

Appendix H: Articles & Books About Mentoring

Articles:

Collet, V.S. (2015). Scaffolds for Change: The Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4(4), 269-292.

Collet, V. S. (2014). The GIR Model: Mentoring for teacher effectiveness. *English Leadership Quarterly*, 37(2), 9-13.

Collet, V. S. (2012). The Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model: Coaching for teacher change. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 51(1), 27-47.

Also, check out Vicki Collet's coaching and mentoring blog: mycoachescouch.blogspot.com

Books:

[*Coaching & Mentoring First-Year and Student Teachers*](#), by India Podsen and Vicki Denmark

[*Mentoring Beginning Teachers: Guiding, Reflecting, Coaching*](#), by Donna Niday, Jean Boreen, Joe Potts, Mary K. Johnson

[*Mentoring and Coaching: A Lifeline for Teachers in a Multicultural Setting*](#), by Denise Gudwin and Magda Salazar-Wallace

[*Mentoring Mathematics Teachers: How to Support and Inspire Pre-Service and Newly Qualified Teachers*](#), by Rosalyn Hyde and Julie-Ann Edwards

[*Mentoring New Teachers*](#), by Hal Portner

[*Mentoring New Teachers through Collaborative Coaching: Linking Teacher and Student Learning*](#), by Kathy Dunne and Susan Villani

[*Mentoring in Action: Guiding, Sharing, and Reflecting With Novice Teachers: A Month-by-Month Curriculum for Teacher Effectiveness*](#), by Carol Radford

[*New Teacher Mentoring: Hopes and Promise for Improving Teacher Effectiveness*](#), by Ellen Moir, Dara Barlin, Janet Gless, and Jan Miles

[*101 Answers for New Teachers and Their Mentors*](#), by Annette Breaux

[*A Better Beginning: Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers*](#), by Marge Scherer

[*Mentoring New Special Education Teachers: A Guide for Mentors and Program Developers*](#), by Mary Lou Duffy

Being an Effective Mentor: How to Help Beginning Teachers Succeed, by Kathleen Jonson

Across the Domains: Examining Best Practices in Mentoring Public School Educators throughout the Professional Journey, edited by Andrea Kent & Andre Green.

Appendix I: Books for Early-Career Teachers

[*Thrive: 5 Ways to \(Re\)Invigorate Your Teaching*](#), by Meenoo Rami

[*No More Taking Away Recess*](#), by Gianna Cassetta and Brook Sawyer

[*The Courage to Teach*](#), by Parker Palmer

[*ish*](#), by Peter Reynolds

[*The Resilient Teacher*](#), by Allen Mendler

[*Teaching with Love and Logic*](#), by Jim Fay

[*The Pressures of Teaching: How Teachers Cope with Classroom Stress*](#), by Maureen Robins

[*The First Days of School*](#), by Harry Wong

[*The Freedom Writers Diary*](#), by the Freedom Writers

[*Educating Esme: Diary of a Teacher's First Year*](#), by Esme Raji Codell

[*Why Didn't I Learn This in College*](#), by Paula Rutherford

[*Teach with Your Strengths*](#), by Rosanne Liesveld

[*The Passionate Teacher*](#), by Robert Fried

[*From Surviving to Thriving*](#), by Marcia Bromfield

[*The Confident Teacher*](#), by Alex Quigley

[*The First Day Jitters*](#), by Julie Danneberg

[*Stress-Busting Strategies for Teachers*](#), by M. Nora Mazzone and Barbara J. Miglionico

Appendix J: Resources for Creating Online Experiences

To craft videos: <http://scopeideabook.scholastic.com/2017/02/what-no-one-knows-about-scope-videos>

To use Google Hangouts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul6CADXyb2s>

<http://elearningindustry.com/6-tips-use-google-hangouts-for-synchronous-learning>

<https://support.google.com/a/answer/4362302?hl=en>

Facebook Live Events:

<https://live.fb.com/tips/>

Appendix K: Other Writing Project Resources

About New Teachers

- New Teachers in Urban Contexts- <http://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/new-teachers-in-urban-contexts-creating-bridges-with-teach-for-america-teachers/>
- NWP New Teacher Initiative: <http://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/the-national-writing-projects-new-teacher-initiative-a-study-of-outcomes-designs-and-core-values/>
<https://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/programs/nti>
- New Teacher Writing Collaborative: <http://sjvwp.org/new-teachers-writing-collaborative/>

About Online Learning

- Online ISI Tips-<http://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/changing-times-adapting-the-invitational-summer-institute-to-an-online-environment/>
- Tools for speaking and listening online (has a section on podcasting):
<http://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/literacy-in-the-digital-age-9-great-speaking-listening-tools/>
- Teacher as blogger - <http://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/writing-project-teachers-as-writers-and-bloggers/>