

COLLABORATION BUILDS CONFIDENCE: THE ROLE OF MENTOR SUPPORT IN  
REDUCING TEACHER ATTRITION

A Thesis

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Lauren Andrea Nardozzi

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by

Lauren Andrea Nardozzi

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Dr. Kristen Alexander

\_\_\_\_\_, Second Reader  
Dr. Sheri Hembree

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Student: Lauren Andrea Nardozzi

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\_\_\_\_\_, Graduate Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Patrick Pieng Date

Department of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education

Abstract  
of  
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This thesis examines the relationship between support for new teachers and self-efficacy for classroom management. The current literature suggests that a portion of new teachers leave the profession entirely within the first five years of employment due to burnout. Research has also shown that pairing teachers with a mentor alone was not enough to reduce the stressors contributing to attrition; the quality of student-mentor interactions as well as adequate support from administrators and colleagues have been reported as the most beneficial factors to helping new teachers feel confident in their abilities. The purpose of this study was to explore how age, grade level, and measures of self-efficacy for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues related in student teaching candidates. In addition, the study investigated the student-mentor relationship from the student's perspective to better understand what their experiences meant to them and which mentor qualities might potentially reduce burnout through co-regulating teacher candidate self-efficacy. Ten teacher candidates from two University teacher preparation programs participated in this study during their final semester.

Quantitative data were collected through the completion of the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale (TISES; Brouwers & Tomic, 2001) and a demographic survey. The questionnaire was accessed online via Survey Monkey. The researcher interviewed five of the ten teacher candidates in this study regarding their overall perceptions about their mentors and experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Correlational analysis of survey data was used to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy for classroom management, interest in grade level and subject matter, and demographic features.

Results indicated that there was a significant relationship between teacher candidate age and self-efficacy. Teacher candidate self-efficacy for classroom management was also strongly related to self-efficacy for eliciting support from colleagues. Teacher candidates interviewed preferred mentors who were flexible, familiar with the program, and adopted a collaborative versus instructive style. Teacher candidates interviewed also believed their training program contributed to their preparation as a teacher, and they all agreed that the practices that had the most influence on their self-efficacy as a teacher were in the field with a mentor. Future research should include a larger sample as well as observations of the student-mentor interaction to further develop the literature on teacher burnout and self-efficacy.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Dr. Kristen Alexander

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The current study explores the relationship between student teachers and their mentors in an attempt to understand how social support impacts and shapes attitudes about teaching ability, and may thus reduce teacher attrition. According to research by the National Center for Education Statistics, 17% of new teachers left the profession after only five years of employment (Gray & Taie, 2015). Past efforts aimed at reducing the rate of teacher attrition, such as raises in pay, have not been a significantly effective prevention (Watlington et al., 2010). High attrition is fiscally detrimental to district budgets due to the time and money it costs to educate, recruit, and train new teachers (Watlington et al., 2010). Low-performing and low-income schools have shown the highest rate of teacher attrition (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Sass et al., 2012; Scheopner, 2010). This is especially troubling because schools with limited resources are likely to benefit from quality and consistency the most.

A recent study found that teachers who quit because of job dissatisfaction account for attrition more frequently than retirees or expectant mothers (Scheopner, 2010). Excessive workloads, challenging students, limited resources, and lack of support are the most commonly cited reasons for career dissatisfaction among both new and experienced teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Number of years teaching is connected to feelings of confidence in personal ability to connect with students (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014), yet even experienced teachers report low self-efficacy for student engagement and

classroom management when lack of social support is also reported to be a problem (Block et al., 2010). DeAngelis, Wall, and Che (2013) found that teachers who reported having sufficient support felt happier and were considerably more likely to keep their job. Therefore, it is important to understand how experience and support can mediate the harmful effects of stressful situations, or in extreme cases, burnout.

### **Burnout**

For the purpose of this study, burnout is extreme emotional exhaustion followed by a decrease in motivation and effortful behavior (Larrivee, 2012). This type of stress is related to a lack of confidence and feelings of an inability to control or cope with certain work conditions. People make decisions based on a variety of factors, but confidence in personal ability, self-efficacy, is useful for persisting through difficult times. Conversely, burnout and feelings of isolation are closely linked to decisions to give up on teaching as a career (Dussault et al., 1999; Ruble & McGrew, 2013; Torres, 2012). For example, one study found that when teachers believed they were not able to manage difficult students or the amount of job-related tasks, job satisfaction decreased significantly (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Additionally, teachers who believe their outcomes are outside of their control are more likely to experience burnout (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). New teachers experience stress more often than experienced teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014). These findings highlight the important role perceptions and beliefs play when it comes to decision-making and behaviors.

## **Teacher Attitudes**

Attitudes are formed through the sharing of ideas; individuals are not passive recipients of events but are rather co-creators of their reality through observation and discourse with others. In other words, people select ideas from their environment and consciously create their own version of truth (Bandura, 1997; 2001; 2012). What a person believes she can do directly relates to her intention to act and ultimately guides what she actually does. There is ample evidence demonstrating the powerful influence intentions and beliefs have on actions. For example, Brady-Amoon and Fuentes (2011) found that self-efficacy significantly impacted college students' academic accomplishments. Saklofske, Michayluk, and Randhwa (1988) discovered that student teachers who reported higher teaching efficacy were rated by their mentor teachers to be more successful with presenting lessons and managing the classroom during their training. Since self-efficacy often leads to more positive outcomes, it is important for mentors to be responsible and supportive when constructing a shared understanding about their student teachers' abilities.

## **Induction Programs**

Teacher candidates are trained through University education and the rehearsal of teaching practices with the help of a cooperating teacher. During their first year as a credentialed teacher, new teachers learn to adapt to unfamiliar students and the

expectations of colleagues. One of the solutions aimed at retaining new teachers and supporting them through the first years is the mandatory completion of an Induction Program. As of 2004, new teachers in California were required to participate in a program called Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA). In December of 2015, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) in the State of California replaced BTSA with the Teacher Induction program. The CTC requires new teachers to complete this program within the first five years of teaching in order to consider the credential process complete. Under BTSA, new teachers were paired with a Support Provider to serve as a guide during their first year; in Teacher Induction programs the Support Provider is referred to as a Mentor. The 2016/2017 school year was the first to implement the new standard. The practices of each Induction Program vary by county and district. Ideally, effective Induction Programs provide new teachers with ongoing training and support for more than one year via consistent administrative support, collaboration with an experienced mentor, and acceptance into the school community (Wong, 2004).

### **Significance of Study**

A review of current research confirms quality support from others helps reduce stress and attrition. Thus, this study explored the role of support in the development of self-efficacy for classroom management and teaching. More specifically, the researcher sought to understand teacher candidates' attitudes about the support they received during

training and what mentor qualities most successfully influenced their self-efficacy. Findings from this study can be of use for training quality Induction Program mentors. Understanding the unique ways the support from an experienced mentor mediates the effects of stress is a significant step toward implementing more effective prevention strategies for reducing teacher attrition due to burnout.

### **Methods**

A qualitative discourse analysis was conducted through semi-structured, open-ended interviews of teacher candidates. A quantitative correlational analysis was also used in this study to assess teacher candidate self-efficacy for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues and administrators.

### **Participants**

Ten teacher candidates from two California University teaching credential programs participated in this study. Teacher candidates were surveyed and interviewed during their last semester while working alongside a mentor (also known as a “cooperating teacher”) in a variety of classrooms. Both University teaching credential programs provide education and training that meets the California Standards for the Teaching Profession criteria.

### **Data Collection**

Teacher self-efficacy was measured by 10 teacher candidates' completion of the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale (TISES; Brouwers & Tomic, 2001; Appendix A). This survey measures teacher candidate self-efficacy for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues and administrators. Teacher candidates also completed a demographic survey to document age, gender, and ethnicity along with the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale. In addition to demographic information, participants were asked to list the grade level and subject matter they were teaching as well as their level of interest for each. All surveys were completed online via Survey Monkey.

Upon completion of each survey, five teacher candidates were interviewed via telephone using an interview protocol of four open-ended questions regarding their overall perceptions about their University training and mentor teachers (Appendix B). Interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Correlational analysis of survey data was employed to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy for classroom management, interest in grade level and subject matter, and demographic features. Qualitative data analysis of teacher candidate interviews was applied by coding verbatim transcripts of interviewer-participant discourse in order to better understand how mentors impact self-efficacy.

### **Limitations**

This study sample was small. A larger pool of participants would allow for more accurate analysis of patterns and relationships. Survey data is limiting in several ways. First, attitudes and beliefs are not stable and change over time. Surveys can only measure perceptions in the present moment. Second, there is no way to guarantee the honesty of the participants. Third, interpretations of the survey questions will differ across participants due to a variety of uncontrollable factors. Finally, surveys are depersonalized which makes it difficult to understand participants' feelings. Follow-up interviews were executed in order to compensate for some of these limitations as well as collect richer data. Interviews were conducted via telephone and were therefore less personal than in-person interviews.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This chapter functioned as a synopsis of the current study. The next chapter will review current literature explaining theoretical models of self-efficacy development as well as the importance of support in reducing burnout. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods used such as measurements, data collection and data analysis procedures, and a detailed description of the participants. Chapter 4 is a report of the results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a review of

the results, an explanation of strengths and limitations, overall conclusions, and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A recent study surveyed over 150,000 teachers in the United States and found that 17% of new teachers decided to quit teaching before completing five years in the field (Gray & Taie, 2015). Of those still teaching after five years, the highest percentage consisted of teachers who had been paired with a mentor during their first year. Evidence shows the primary reason mentoring is an effective intervention for preventing attrition is because mentors enhance new teacher confidence and self-efficacy (Brill & McCartney, 2008; DeAngelis, Wall & Che, 2013; Dussault et. al, 1999; Futernick, 2007; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011; Sass, Seal & Martin, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The current chapter will thus review current literature on teacher burnout and attrition, the foundations of self-efficacy, and the relation of self-efficacy with teacher persistence, attitudes, and burnout factors, with a particular focus on how early and sustained support for new teachers increases efficacy and thus reduces attrition.

#### **Teacher Attrition**

Although some teacher attrition is due to personal factors (e.g., cynicism, career commitment, values, etc.) and/or life choices (e.g., pursuing a higher degree, retirement, or maternity leave), a substantial number of teachers leave for occupational reasons (Futernik, 2008; Mojsa-Kaja, Golonka & Marek, 2015; Watlington et al., 2010). Factors

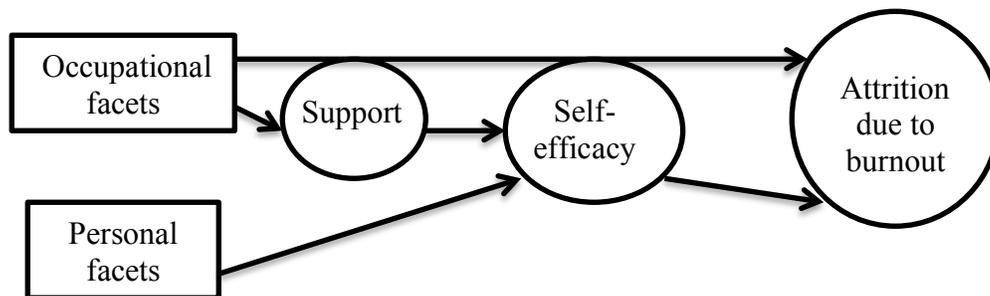
such as the demanding workload, student misconduct, lack of student engagement with the material, and professional isolation are common occupational sources of teacher stress which increases the likelihood of burnout and attrition (Brill & McCartney, 2008). The challenging assignment of teaching necessitates teachers keep up with the ever-changing requirements of teaching, such as increasing classroom sizes or policy/methodological changes to align with standardized testing. Moreover, research shows teachers judge their own success according to student engagement and performance; when students are not succeeding teachers may believe they are not successful teachers, perpetuating stress and an attitude of uncertainty with their choice of profession (Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011). Additionally, people who lack efficacy in certain areas have been shown to avoid tasks in those areas (Bandura, 1997). Also, studies have found that feelings of isolation are also strongly tied to occupational stress (Dussault et. al, 1999). The current study focused on potential moderators of these negative occupational conditions often associated with teacher stress, job dissatisfaction, and attrition. Specifically, because negative conditions can lead to teacher burnout, how teachers feel about their own teaching skills and interventions to increase their efficacy may be amongst the most fruitful factors to consider in studying teacher burnout.

### **Sources of Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in her ability to accomplish a specific task or goal. Self-efficacy has been linked to actual performance in a host of different

domains, including teaching (Butz & Usher, 2015; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Increasing self-efficacy is one way to reduce burnout. According to Bandura (1997), people tend to avoid the more challenging responsibilities in areas they are not confident about, and tend to give up more often than those with a higher sense of self-efficacy. Research has shown that support from others during the learning process is related to stronger self-efficacy for teaching and may help diminish feelings of self-doubt (Settlage et al., 2009). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model use in this study to examine support's role in self-efficacy and burnout.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of support's role in self-efficacy and burnout



Ideas are interpretations of a person's experiences, which includes his observations. An individual's decision to copy a behavior, enact a familiar role, or try something new, depends on her existing self-efficacy beliefs. Actual and perceived competence is unstable; self-efficacy beliefs develop over time (Bandura, 2001). There are various internal and external processes that affect how people develop beliefs (Bandura, 2012). Perception, attention, judgment and memory are all internally regulated

by the individual, but influenced by and developed through his or her interactions with others (Gredler, 2009).

Cultural-historical theorist Lev Vygotsky (2004) believed that language is an important cultural tool connected to internal thoughts; he believed that through discourse, people socially create understandings about their world. This intersubjectivity, or the practice of co-constructing meaning, facilitates development and growth. The specific mechanisms through which the sociocultural context affects student teachers' attitudes depends on their constructed understandings of their abilities, which is based on several sources of input. In particular, people act on beliefs about what they think they can do in a given context (Bandura, 1997). Crucial to this idea is an understanding of self-efficacy, which is the judgment of personal ability, and how it plays a key role in self-regulation and decision-making. Social cognitive theorist Albert Bandura (2001) maintains that people with a high sense of efficacy tend to behave in ways that are likely to lead to desirable outcomes. Beliefs help people plan and arrange their lives. Bandura also emphasizes that self-efficacy affects whether a person expects positive or negative things to happen based on subjective ease or difficulty of a task. These attitudes dictate contexts in which people choose to participate. Teachers weigh what they want to achieve with what they think they can do in the classroom. This act of contemplation is not constantly occurring, but rather, self-efficacy beliefs are attended to when it is necessary to take some action, like lesson planning (Bandura, 1997). There are several variables that affect self-efficacy, but according to Bandura (1997), the most influential source is actual experience.

## **Enactive Experience**

Gaining skills through the actual performance of a task is referred to as an enactive experience (Bandura, 1997). Enactive experiences are hands-on approaches to learning and are the most beneficial to the development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. The subjective meaning of enactive experiences is primarily what shapes self-efficacy beliefs. Collective successes or failures dictate the overall perception of experience, and in turn the perception of personal ability. Failure tends to make people doubt their abilities. Success on the other hand serves as a confirmation that one is in fact capable of performing. A series of successful enactive experiences is also referred to as mastery experiences. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) define mastery experiences in teachers as, "... a sense of satisfaction with one's past teaching successes" (p. 945). The same researchers found that mastery experience is significantly linked to self-efficacy in teachers; the more satisfied teachers are with their performance, the higher their self-efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005). It is helpful for teachers to have mastery experiences in teaching because actual experiences are tangible proof of what is possible.

Teachers who have mastery experiences tend to recover faster and more often when faced with challenges (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is an attitude that encourages productive actions; people do not typically try things they are doubtful they can accomplish successfully. Thus, when people set out to try something new, they have some idea that they are likely to succeed or are capable of learning how to succeed. Many first year teachers do not have much, if any, experience with managing an entire

classroom of students. A study of special education teachers who spent an average of 12-17 years teaching in Finland, China, and South Africa found that any experience interactive with or teaching individuals with special needs was the most significant source of self-efficacy among teachers in all three countries (Malinen, Savolainen, & Engelbrecht, 2013). Even across diverse cultures, mastery experience plays a crucial role in self-efficacy development.

Several other investigations into teacher preparation effectiveness have found that student teachers prefer and benefit more from interactive collaboration with their mentor teachers (Devereaux et. al, 2010; Torres, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). According to a study investigating the identity development of student teachers, feedback and direct instruction from mentors were considered contributors to successful teaching practices (Settlage et al., 2009). The multiple subject credential majors in this study taught a diverse group of elementary school students during their practicum semester following a methods course. The researchers utilized quantitative scales to measure teaching candidates' self-efficacy as well as conducted follow up interviews of a sample of participants. Self-efficacy grew during the observational learning period then slightly decreased during student teaching, supporting earlier findings that enactive experience has a greater impact on self-efficacy than vicarious experience. Most participants reported their success was due to their perception of student engagement or interest, and the support and feedback from their mentors is what helped them successfully engage with students. By perfecting their lesson planning skills, student teachers in this study felt they were better able to generate their student's interest. These findings highlight the

importance of experience paired with collaborative support. Indirect experiences can also influence self-efficacy beliefs. The current study examined how collaborative support impacts novice teacher self-efficacy.

### **Vicarious Experience**

On average, novice teachers have lower self-efficacy beliefs for utilizing strategies for teaching than experienced teachers do (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Additionally, newer teachers report low self-efficacy for promoting student engagement and success compared to experienced teachers (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Kilday, Lenser & Miller, 2016). When experience is lacking, people watch what others do as a resource to decide if they are capable of doing the same thing. This type of observational experience is referred to in social cognitive theory as a vicarious experience (Bandura, 1997; 2001). An important factor in mediating the relationship between observation and individual self-efficacy is the relevance of what is being observed. Individuals attend to people and environments that are in some way relevant to their own progress. When an observer considers a successful individual to share similar abilities, the observer is more likely to imitate the individual's behaviors in order to achieve some goal, which is especially useful in unfamiliar situations (Bandura, 1997). Observation first involves attention to useful stimuli, then the perception of external input, and finally the internal reorganization of thought through the rehearsal of potential outcomes. Mental rehearsal is useful because it helps the individual make decisions about what to do in an unknown situation.

Novice teachers need examples to help them build new skills. In the classroom context, colleagues and administrators are the most valuable examples for student teachers. For this reason, most teacher education programs pair student teachers with a mentor teacher during their final semesters as students to serve as a real-world example of how to teach and run a classroom. Mentor teachers are ideal models for novice teachers because they perform the same tasks student teachers will in their own classroom.

Wang, Ertmer, and Newby (2004) conducted a study on the relationship between vicarious influence and student teacher self-efficacy for teaching using technology. One group of participants watched video of K-12 teachers demonstrating how they prepare, teach, and evaluate their practices for using a software program in the classroom. A different group was only provided with instructions on how to use the program by referencing the software's website. Participants who witnessed teacher examples of how the software was used in teaching practice reported significantly higher self-efficacy for teaching than those who just received instructions, supporting the assertion that modeling supports and strengthens learning.

Similarly, Anderson and Moeed (2017) conducted a qualitative study of the sources of teacher self-efficacy through interviews with 26 elementary school science teachers. Teachers in this study agreed to participate in a six-month professional development program working directly alongside actual scientists performing their job duties in their field. The researchers discovered that a significant number of participant teachers cited vicarious learning as a contributor to their understanding and confidence in

teaching science. One participant stated, "It has been good to see the Nature of Science in action in authentic situations. I have observed scientists sharing their explanations and observations of their research with other scientists in colloquiums and presentations" (Anderson & Moeed, 2017, p. 281). The researchers concluded that the opportunity to observe was effective in shaping self-efficacy because observations were commonly cited as having an influence on participants' understanding; modeling provided context for later discussion and instruction.

### **Verbal Persuasion**

People develop self-efficacy through experiences and observations, as well as encouraging feedback from other people, also referred to as verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion consists of direct statements or feedback that alter and shape self-efficacy beliefs in some way. Verbal persuasion increases self-efficacy when encouraging statements are perceived as realistic; the more convincing the feedback is, the greater one's judgment of personal ability becomes (Bandura, 1997). Feedback must be realistic and personal in order for the recipient to accept it. For example, Devereaux et al. (2010) studied student teachers in a professional development program and found that participants preferred being more actively involved in the lessons because the feedback they received was considered personalized, which gave the feedback more relevance. This study did not consider changes in beliefs about the self, however.

Self-efficacy changes as contexts change, and feedback can be a useful source for teachers in unfamiliar contexts. Verbal persuasion has the potential to minimize doubt

and is a form of support that is useful to preventing burnout (Bandura, 1997 & 2001; Joet, Usher & Bressoux, 2011). Thus, an important function of mentor teachers is to provide evaluative feedback as a way to help the student teacher succeed in their new environment.

Self-efficacy involves a shared understanding and can be influenced by feedback from others. Saklofske, Michayluk and Randhawa (1988) measured student teachers' attitudes about how an ideal teacher should behave. The study involved a random sample of 87 of the participants who received evaluations from supervising teachers on eight categories of teaching behaviors. Supervising teachers and college professors provided coaching and gave feedback on student teacher behaviors including professionalism, planning, and teaching practices. Participants who reported high teaching efficacy also received good ratings from their mentor teachers on teaching performance and classroom management behaviors.

Mentors collaborate with students to generate a shared understanding of old and new concepts. The socially negotiated reorganization of ideas is what Vygotsky (2004) refers to as a higher mental process. A mentor can mediate student thought through directive feedback, persuasion, and discussion of cultural expectations. Feedback helps students reorganize existing beliefs. Discussions about classroom expectations help student teachers understand the occupational rules of teaching. Self-efficacy constantly changes at the onset of each new experience; therefore, self-efficacy development can be considered a higher mental process. The quality of mentor-student collaboration is vital to the development of healthy student attitudes, such as confidence.

Mentor feedback has a more powerful impact on self-efficacy when it highlights the learner's ability, is perceived as feasible and credible, and is specific to the learner (Bandura, 1997; Devereaux et al., 2010). Credibility is an essential component to the development of self-efficacy. One study of student teacher responses to feedback found that student teachers judged their mentor's feedback to be credible if their mentor demonstrated adequate knowledge of general teaching practices, subject matter and curriculum (Cherasaro et al., 2016). In this same study, most student teachers reported they made changes specifically in response to feedback they received. This supports the idea that feedback can alter existing beliefs and encouragement is most valuable for reducing feelings of doubt.

### **Emotional States**

During times of stress, people experience emotional and physiological responses outside the norm, affecting self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Under such circumstances, people either employ coping strategies in an effort to control and change their state of arousal, or they doubt their abilities out of fear their emotions will hinder their performance. The harm of low self-efficacy is that it can mask actual ability with a false sense of incompetence. Coping efficacy, the belief in one's ability to handle stressful situations, is associated with strength under pressure (Bandura, 2001), and in student teachers, high coping efficacy has a strong relationship to positive appraisals of their teaching abilities (Poom-Valickis, 2014). Teachers cope with changing contexts and demands daily. Brill and McCartney (2008) found that in previous research on teacher

attrition, teachers often reported occupational stressors, such as too much work and a lack of leadership, as the reason they felt burnout and chose to leave.

A recent study of 481 student teachers in Germany measured student teachers' satisfaction with their preservice preparation, and they examined patterns of coping behaviors at work (Zimmerman et al., 2012). The researchers utilized a questionnaire to measure student teacher perceptions of their own coping behaviors and their experiences. Based on their answers, student teachers were sorted into one of four categories of coping behaviors associated with healthy or unhealthy attitudes: "excessively ambitious", "exhausted/resigned", "healthy-ambitious", or "unambitious" (Zimmerman et al., 2012, p. 869). The researchers found that 40% of participants were either in the excessively ambitious or exhausted (burnt out) category, and just over half of the participants reported feeling unprepared for teaching. Statistical analysis in this study also found that the more prepared student teachers felt, the less they showed patterns of overexertion or burnout. These findings support the previous research that affirms student teacher self-efficacy is vulnerable during training periods and that self-efficacy has an inverse relationship to burnout.

Student behavior has also been associated with feelings of stress amongst both novice and experienced teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Sass, Seal & Martin, 2011; Zimmerman et Al., 2012). One study focused on special education teacher self-efficacy due to the additional challenges associated with diverse learners, and the researchers found that self-efficacy for classroom management and administrative support are connected to lower burnout (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2011). The authors postulated

that burnout was most strongly linked to how confident teachers felt in their ability to manage their students.

There have been a number of studies linking quality mentorship to the development of self-confidence in student teachers (Faucette & Nugent, 2017; Otaala, 2018). Faucette & Nugent (2017) reviewed reflective journal entries of 15 junior physical education majors who were paired with 11 senior PE majors to understand the benefits of the mentor role. They discovered that having a mentor increased student self-efficacy greatly because mentors were able to communicate what to expect in the program as well as share ideas about how to write lesson plans. Otaala (2018) surveyed 155 preservice teachers in Uganda and interviewed 38 of them to measure their attitudes about their mentors and training. They discovered that while not all participants liked their mentors, they still developed some level of self-efficacy in response to having a person to support them.

### **Support Minimizes Burnout**

According to Bandura (1997), "Burnout in academia is not all that uncommon. It encompasses a syndrome of reactions to prolonged occupational stressors that includes physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of the people one is serving, and lack of any sense of personal accomplishment" (p. 242). Research on teacher preparation programs found that teaching efficacy grows over time during the education and preparation phase, but falls after the initial school year begins as a credentialed teacher

(Hoy & Spero, 2005). Persistent doubt often results in teacher burnout (Brunsting, Sreckovic & Lane, 2014). One study of the sources of self-efficacy among novice and career teachers found that those with high self-efficacy for teaching also report less burn out, and are more likely to persist through the challenges of teaching (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teachers who feel supported not only feel more efficacious but also report less difficulty with assignments and less feelings of burnout (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011; Sass, Seal & Martin, 2011).

As mentioned in the previous sections, coping efficacy can increase over time with practice and is also shaped by positive feedback. More often, new teachers decide to remain teaching when they are paired with a mentor (Gray & Taie, 2015). Feelings of exclusion among colleagues are strongly tied to job dissatisfaction, and many new teachers interviewed in the last decade reported lack of support was a major contributing factor of their burnout (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Dussault et al., 1999; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Therefore, quality support is important in making new teachers feel welcome and supported. Self-efficacy for teaching during teacher preparation tends to last during the first year teaching when quality interactions with a mentor teacher are present (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Research on teacher preparation program effectiveness found that when teachers received adequate support they were much less likely to quit (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). The researchers also discovered that the participants were most satisfied and less likely to quit when they felt they received adequate interaction and encouraging feedback. Other teachers in training preferred when their time was spent on meaningful

tasks as well as having an opportunity to observe teaching practices (Devereaux et al., 2010). The type of adequate support educators desire is comprised of quality discourse with their mentor, support from principals and administrators, and warmth and acceptance from other teachers and faculty. Effective leaders regularly visit classrooms and attend staff meetings. Being present gives administrators more credibility with their staff and their input is perceived as more genuine and personal. Teachers want management to weigh in on important matters affecting their classroom. Teachers also want to have the autonomy to modify parts of the curriculum, when necessary, in order to better support their students.

Yet, current research suggests that in order to master a complex task such as teaching, mentorship is only one tier of support needed to foster high levels of self-efficacy (Wong, 2004). Therefore, it is also important to understand the culture of teacher education and training programs and the impact they have on student teacher self-efficacy. Learning is an ongoing process that occurs through collaboration with others and not in isolation. Research has shown that collaboration is a method many teachers use to engage students, and when their students are engaged, teachers often report higher self-efficacy (Guo et Al., 2011). Officials should ensure training programs provide quality mentorship by examining how current aspects of mentoring are affecting teacher candidates.

## The Present Study

Self-efficacy is crucial to new teacher adjustment and success throughout their career, especially in the beginning. Practice, modeling, and valuable collaboration with a mentor teacher all foster positive self-efficacy in teachers. Collaboration enhances the effects of practice and modeling. While workload and classroom size have been cited as attrition factors (Brill & McCartney, 2008), burnout also occurs when teachers report not receiving comprehensive support from mentors, colleagues, or administration. This is especially important for novice teachers. Induction programs were implemented to provide additional support, but the most current changes implemented in the State of California have yet to be tested in terms of the effectiveness on student teacher retention and self-efficacy.

Teachers form self-efficacy beliefs through direct and indirect experiences, feedback, and confidence. Some primary sources of positive self-efficacy have been shown in teachers with mentors providing feedback and collaboration, thus altering negative perceptions often formed from prior failures by encouraging the idea that failures are a normal part of growing as an educator. As teachers enact their new skills to gain self-efficacy, mentors can provide vicarious reinforcement through demonstration, direct and honest feedback, and encouragement and emotional support to reduce stress and provide coping skills. Although this research supports the idea of mentors as an important teaching instrument, the quality of mentor support is of the greatest importance.

The aim of the present study was to gain more insight into the current program practices and teacher candidate's attitudes to better understand how mentors influence student confidence. The research indicates mentors are a beneficial resource yet little is understood about the mentor qualities that effect student self-efficacy the most. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, the present study examined teacher candidate perceptions related to their teacher credentialing program that may relate to improved self-efficacy in the classroom, with an emphasis on mentor relationships.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

Preventing teacher attrition is a complex task. While policy makers and administrators may not be able to control the personal factors that contribute to teacher attrition, they can improve occupational supports to help retain teachers. The literature on teacher attrition has shown that many burnt out teachers cited lack of support as a reason for resigning (Brill & McCartney, 2008; DeAngelis, Wall & Che, 2013; Dussault et al., 1999; Sass, Seal & Martin, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore the qualities of the mentor-teacher relationship to understand how support from a mentor might lessen the effects of occupational stress and burnout so that teachers persist long enough to gain valuable experience. Mastery experience has the most influence on a person's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997), and because student teachers have little to no experience, the current study focused on student teachers' self-reported self-efficacy for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues and administrators. Other potential predictors of teacher self-efficacy included demographic variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity, in addition to prior experience, and personal variables such as subjective interest in the grade level and subject matter in which teacher candidates were participating.

## Participants

A recruitment flyer and consent form with a link to the online survey (Appendix C) was sent to Teaching Credential professors at two Universities (one in Northern California and one in Southern California) to distribute among their student teachers in their final semester. The final sample included the 10 teacher candidates who responded via Survey Monkey.

Participants' age ranged from 23 to 41 years of age ( $M = 27$  years). Ninety percent of participants were female and 10% were male. Regarding ethnicity, 30% identified as Asian, 30% as Hispanic/Latino(a), and 40% as White. Grade level taught ranged from Kindergarten to 6th grade ( $M = 3$ rd grade). All participants taught multiple subjects.

From amongst these participants, five teacher candidates completed a follow-up telephone interview. Of the five candidates interviewed, 4 were female and 1 male. Regarding reported ethnicity, 2 identified as White, 2 identified as Latino(a) and 1 identified as Asian.

## Measures

### Interpersonal Self-Efficacy

Subjective interpersonal self-efficacy was measured using the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale (TISES; Brouwers & Tomic, 2001; Appendix A). Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed to 24 statements related to

their student teaching experiences and interpersonal self-efficacy beliefs (SE) using a 6-point Likert-type scale from 1, "Strongly Agree," to 6, "Strongly Disagree." The scale examines different contexts involved with interpersonal self-efficacy and is divided into three subscales: Classroom Management (CM), Eliciting Support from Colleagues (SC), and Eliciting Support from Principals (SP). The *Classroom Management* subscale included 14 statements (e.g., "I am always able to make my expectations clear to students"). The *Eliciting Support from Colleagues* subscale included 5 items (e.g., "I am confident that, if necessary, I can ask my colleagues for advice"). The *Eliciting Support from Principals* subscale included 5 items (e.g., "I am confident that, if necessary, I can get principals to help me"). For each scale, items were averaged to provide a single score for each, and when reliability of the scales was considered all Cronbach's alphas exceeded .65 (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Cronbach's Alpha for Self-Efficacy Subscales*

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
1. Classroom Management	.67	14
2. Eliciting Support from Colleagues	.87	5
3. Eliciting Support from Principals	.97	5

### **Demographic Information**

The demographic survey (see Appendix A) measured items such as age, gender, and ethnicity of teacher candidates. Additionally, teacher candidates were asked questions about the grade-level and subject matter they were involved with as a teacher candidate participating in a classroom setting.

### **Attitudes of Preservice Training and Support**

The interview protocol consisted of four open-ended questions (see Table 2). To better understand novice teacher attitudes, participants were asked to consider the degree of influence the Induction Program design and mentors had on their overall feelings of preparedness. Both university professors and cooperating classroom teachers were considered mentors in this study.

**Table 2**

*Interview Questions*

Number	Question
1.	Did your teacher training experience prepare you for teaching?
2.	What is your overall perception of your teaching credential program?
3.	How do you feel about your mentor relationships?
4.	Do you feel like you have changed in response to the professional development program?

### **Procedure**

The online quantitative survey was used during the Spring 2017 semester to administer the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale and demographic survey. All 10 participating teacher candidates were contacted for a follow up telephone interview one month after they completed their survey. Five responded and agreed to be interviewed. Semi-structured telephone interviews were audio-recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive and correlational analyses were used to investigate the relationship between several variables, including student teacher self-efficacy for eliciting support, classroom management, and attitudes about their training experiences. In addition, a qualitative analysis of student teacher interviews was completed. The researcher transcribed verbatim the recordings of each interview using a qualitative analysis software, Transana. In order to identify attitudes that were similar, transcriptions were coded using open coding. Once patterns were identified, the researcher performed focused coding using the collections of coded data to begin analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

Data were collected to address the question: How do age, grade level taught, and measures of self-efficacy relate in student teachers? To better understand these findings in the context of their experiences, additional questions involved asking participants to describe their student-mentor relationship and share if they felt confident and prepared to teach as a result of their current training and education. This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative analyses and the themes that emerged from qualitative interview data.

#### **How Do Age, Grade Level Taught, and Measures of Self-Efficacy Relate?**

Descriptive statistics for self-efficacy variables and correlations among those variables and other variables of interest are presented in Table 3. The results show that as student teachers felt more efficacious with classroom management, they also tended to be more efficacious for eliciting support from colleagues and principals. Although the results were not significant for the other variables, moderate but non-significant correlation coefficients may indicate teaching a higher grade level is related to lower efficacy for all three SE measures, such that those teaching higher grade levels felt less efficacious. Also, as age of participants increased, self-efficacy also tended to increase for classroom management and seeking support from colleagues. The manner in which

self-efficacy related to participants' narrative on job satisfaction and burnout is explored further in the next section. Self-efficacy measures are represented in the following table as self-efficacy (SE) for classroom management, for support from colleagues, and for eliciting support from principals.

**Table 3**

*Correlations, Means, & Standard Deviations for Scores on the TISES & Demographics*

<i>Variables</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. SE Class Management	–				
2. SE Colleague Support	.83**				
3. SE Principal Support	.70*	.50			
4. Grade	.35	.33	.44		
5. Age	-.33	-.34	.14	.73	
<i>M</i>	2.43	1.78	2.52	3.4	27.4
<i>SD</i>	.30	.72	1.42	2.12	6.02

*Notes:* \* $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed); \*\* $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed).

### Interview Data

The objective of gathering and analyzing narrative interview data was to explore mentor qualities to understand which qualities student teachers felt were most beneficial to their development as educators. The following excerpts are taken from transcribed

audio-recorded interviews with five of the 10 teacher candidates in this study. Responses are separated into themes that emerged from the data. The first section illustrates themes regarding mentor qualities (shown in Table 4) as they related to teacher candidate self-efficacy, and the last section will address teacher candidate attitudes about their teaching credential program as it related to their self-efficacy. To support optimal understanding of the following interview data, the acronym "TC" is used to represent "teacher candidate" followed by the first and last initial of the interviewee.

### **Mentor Qualities Related to Self-Efficacy**

Each teacher candidate interviewed was asked to share how they felt about their mentors. Participants preferred when their mentors were willing to work outside the parameters of the program. They also desired mentors who were already familiar with their credential program or who shared similar experiences in some way. Finally, teacher candidates preferred mentors who were actively involved in their learning more as a partner rather than an instructor.

**Table 4***Preferred Mentor Qualities Related to Student Teacher Self-Efficacy*

<i>Mentor qualities related to SE</i>	<i>Sample item</i>
Flexibility	"Having the staff there willing to work with us and kind of change their schedule up a little bit for us really made the program much simpler and smoother."
Familiarity	"I know my current mentor in the resource room has been absolutely amazing, and I find that its also because she went through the same program that I went through and she had a lot of the same professors. And so she understands the rigor and the expectations that are upheld."
Collaborative style	"I was very fortunate that I got two very <i>active</i> teachers and mentors that I was able to collaborate with them and work on things, and they were very open-minded."

**Flexibility**

Mentor flexibility was a desirable quality among teacher candidates. Time constraints were a dominant theme throughout the interviews, and participants felt most supported when their mentors were willing to be flexible around scheduling and deadlines. One participant stated:

Having the staff there willing to work with us, and kind of change their schedule up a little bit for us, really made the program much simpler and smoother to truly understand the grasp of teaching in an everyday classroom.  
-TC XV

Another participant liked that one of her mentors demonstrated more fluidity in her instructional style:

My previous mentor, she liked to use that, but she also used supplemental materials. It looked more project-based learning in her classroom which I tended

to like a little more compared to my second placement which was a little more rigorous to the school program.

-TC KR

The same teacher candidate also liked that both mentors gave her permission to explore but also expressed that there was a difference between exploration and neglect,

"both gave me space to explore different styles which was very nice ..." (TC KR).

One teacher candidate added to this idea by explaining that she preferred a mentor open to using materials both:

My cooperating teacher was very open. She allowed me to test the waters. She allowed me to do a lot of things *my* way, and so it helped me create my own teacher outfit, in a sense. If that makes sense. Not wanting to be in *her* shoes ... like how *she* teaches, but kinda finding my own way, my own teaching perspective. I had a lot of support in that area, so it was good.

-TC NM

When describing the additional support she received from staff teachers at her placement, one teacher candidate mentioned:

I found, you know, in my gen ed placement that I had, teachers who were willing to invite me into their classroom and teach me what they knew, but they were also very up front with the fact that they *weren't* perfect at that it was- it's ok. But to try and learn from them and what they were doing so that I can make adjustments or find different ways of approaching uh, you know, different areas in teaching. I know I've learned a lot about classroom management and how I would want to run it and how I wouldn't want to run it, what I would want to borrow from other teachers.

-TC SS

One teacher candidate enjoyed his mentor's student-directed approach to collaborating.

This participant stated,

She was a very teach by doing type of teacher, so she was more like step back and observe. She didn't really want to um, disrupt my instruction while I was in the middle of it. So she basically sat back, let me do my thing, and then we

usually met up either after there was a break or after school and talked about like, what I did or what I could have done. It was- I liked the strategy.  
-TC TH

These statements illustrate that mentor flexibility was a desirable quality perceived by teacher candidates in this study.

### **Familiarity**

Teacher candidates also reported greater efficacy when they had a mentor who had already experienced the same credential program. For instance, one participant stated:

I know my current mentor in the resource room has been absolutely amazing. And I find that it's also because she went through the same program that I went through. And she had a lot of the same professors. And so she understands the rigor and the expectations that, you know, are upheld. Um, she's been an excellent example and model for how I would hope to run um an elementary school resource room.  
-TC SS

A different teacher candidate shared a similar opinion saying,

... if I didn't have the mentor it would have been really difficult. Um, so I was very fortunate that my mentors were open-minded in using this program and that one out of the two mentors I had was a recent graduate from the program so she knew where we were kind of steering with it.  
-TC XV

One teacher candidate was paired with a mentor in a cultural immersion program. When asked if she had one or two collaborative teachers she responded:

I had two. So um, the first semester I had um, a fourth grade class, and it was English only in regular school. And this semester I was fortunate to go into a Hmong immersion school and classroom too. So um, it was really, us, it was different, but it helped me find where I wanted to be. So I definitely want to be in

an immersion school where I am able to use my language, I am able to use my culture to help my students and so, ya.  
-TC NM

### **Collaborative Style**

Teaching candidates gained the most confidence from mentors whose style was more inclusive in nature rather than unidirectional. For example, one participant said:

I was very fortunate that I got two very *active* teachers and mentors that I was able to collaborate with them and work on things, and they were very open-minded.  
-TC XV

The interviewer later asked if she also received administrative support to which she responded:

I would say so, ya. I definitely think that having a team, um, both of the schools- both the schools I'm at are both at- both of them have really great grade-level teams, among working with the Principal and other resource teachers. So I think it made my experience much simpler. Or much *easier*, and, was able to truly understand all aspects that go into teaching.

Another teacher candidate communicated a similar opinion that engagement was connected to her growth and confidence:

When I hear Principals aren't in their office all day and they're out in their classrooms and they're out engaging with students and they're out engaging with their teachers; *that's* the community I want to teach in. That's the school that I find I can improve in. That's where I want to grow.  
-TC SS

She also provided an example of how the administrative support she received contributed to her belief in her teaching abilities, stating:

The more I know the more I am able to, you know, grow and meet the needs of students. I know I've had my Principal come in and observe me and give me

points and tips, those things that I haven't necessarily thought about, and then be able to apply those, you know, ideas in my teaching the very next day.

These excerpts are a few examples of how collaboration relates to teacher candidate self-efficacy.

### **Credential Program Practices Related to Self-Efficacy**

All participants interviewed agreed that their preservice education and training helped them prepare for success as a teacher overall. When asked whether their training helped them feel prepared, participants' responses included:

I believe it has. Um, I've been in my program for now two years, and I've had extensive preparation in a variety of areas, from uh literacy development to classroom management.

-TC SS

Some student teachers felt the program contributed to their self-efficacy for teaching, but only in certain ways. One student teacher explained:

I feel though that [the program] prepares you fairly well I think for the professional environment in *some* areas. So I think professionalism, interviewing, general you know- you know behaviors you should have around coworkers and all of that. I mean that's basic but they I think they go over that fairly well.

-TC KR

Another student stated, "Definitely in my uh, credential program has helped me uh, think about what I should- should be implementing in my, uh, lessons" (TC TH).

The next section outlines teacher candidate perspectives about the components of the credential program that related to their self-efficacy (see Table 5). Student teachers seemed to agree that hands-on experiences had the most influence on their confidence for

teaching and classroom management, a moderate workload was also highly preferred, and participants shared they had grown to be more reflective and self-aware as a result of their teaching credential program.

**Table 5**

*Aspects of The Teacher Credential Program Contributing to Teaching Candidate Self-Efficacy*

<i>Program practices related to</i>	<i>Sample item</i>
<i>SE</i>	
Hands-on teaching experience	I find that through my experience- my experiences teaching I've been able to overcome the loses I guess that I felt in those subject areas. I ultimately believe that being out in the field has been the most beneficial to my development as an educator." -TC SS
Moderate workload	"... so I had limited time to instruct but I had to be getting, reaching all of these- what curriculum are you getting done? What assessments have you gotten done? Well, I have no time to teach, you know, so that was a difficult environment to work with." -TC KR
Reflection/Self-awareness	"My goal is to be better every single day, and the way I can do that is continue to grow, and reflect on my teaching so that I can be better." --TC SS

### **Hands-on Teaching Experiences**

The participants in this study felt that both prior to and recent hands-on experiences contributed most to their self-efficacy. Examples include:

Um, I was in, a, lower income school growing up and then once I moved over to Sacramento I started working at a Title 1 school and distinguished schools and feel that that prepared me pretty well to teach in a variety of classrooms.

-TC XV

Another participant shared that her prior experiences compensated for any information not covered in the program:

I feel that, you know, the areas of math, science and um, social studies could have been maybe, more than what I received. But I find that, um, through my experience- my experiences teaching, I've been able to overcome the loses I guess hat I felt in those subject areas.

-TC SS

Later the same participant explained that her prior experiences contributed to her self-efficacy classroom management:

I know I've learned a lot about classroom management and how I would want to run it, what I would want to borrow from teachers and um, I also attribute that to my experiences being a substitute as well.

-TC SS

A different teacher candidate felt her teaching credential program weakened the self-efficacy she developed from prior teaching experiences,

I had a lot of experience- well before I entered the program I had worked as an after school program teacher teaching science and art, and I um, worked around the schools in the Sacramento area, different districts through field experience and through um, community work. And I feel like I had a good grasp on- I guess teacher procedures, how it should look, how curriculum development should be, and then through getting into the program and kind of them telling us all the aspects that we *weren't* doing and having us focus on areas that I felt were unnecessary and kind of highlighting, um- they would almost become obsessed with certain parts of the lesson plan development where then we'd go to- instead of lesson plan delivery.

-TC KR

Later, the interviewer asked if she had made any changes in response to the teaching credential program she responded,

I feel as if a lot of the program didn't help me professionally develop as a teacher and if anything I feel like in areas where I feel comfortable I almost regressed in a way um because of the program.

Participants also shared a strong preference for time spent teaching versus talking or thinking about it. For example, one student teacher stated:

I think the program gave us a lot of ideas, but just how- how to implement it in our classroom. That's one of the struggles that I- I feel, and I think a lot of other people may have felt the same way. So for example, you know, um, multicultural social justice. They taught us what it is, but it- it kind of ended there instead of teaching us how to use it. How to integrate it into our daily lesson plans.  
-TC NM

Another teaching candidate added to this sentiment of confusion and shared her desire for more hands-on teaching experiences:

I felt that I got more real-life and practical skills in my undergraduate compared to this program. I felt with this program a lot of picking and choosing what was necessary and what was busy work. I felt a lot of it were things that they filled our time with, things that we didn't need to do. Where we could have been either in the classroom or in workshops or problem-solving things that were real-life situations.  
-TC KR

While teaching candidates felt coursework was tedious, some candidates felt their mentors helped alleviate their confusion by demonstrating how to apply new information in the lessons. One teaching candidate affirmed, "I think I had really great mentors. I think that my mentors were knowledgeable within their subjects and with the real-life scenarios and how to *apply* a majority of the time" (TC XV). When asked if she felt they helped prepare her for teaching she affirmed, "They did."

Experience was associated with one teacher candidate's self-efficacy for eliciting support from administrators and other teachers. For example:

At any site that I end up teaching at I want to develop those relationships with my principal so they know that the way I feel that I not meeting a need is when I'm stretching anything I can to teach the whole class and to teach each individual student. So yes I feel like I would be comfortable with approaching Principals now that I've had the experience.

-TC SS

Student teachers felt their hands-on experience was the most influential aspect of the credential program on their self-efficacy. One student teacher said, "Um, I ultimately believe that being out in the field has been the most beneficial in to my development, uh, as an educator" (TC SS).

Another participant also considered student teaching to be 'real-world' experience:

Also the real-world experience that they give us of student teaching, and I guess, help that we got, or at least I got, as a student teacher is we were able to actually sit down and plan things, get all your units together and just take over the classes.

-TC TH

When asked what her professional development program could have focused on more one participant replied, "Real-life scenarios. Um, a lot of things were hypothetical" (TC XV).

### **Moderate Workload**

Teaching candidates interviewed held mixed feelings about the necessity of some of the credential program coursework. Many of them reported feeling that they did not have enough time to grapple with the practical aspects of teaching. For example, one participant stated:

... the professor didn't schedule accordingly. We never really got to the deep, like principles of teaching, let's sit here and talk about behavioral management and

different theories and it was very um, kind of just, one-note instead of just kind of talking about all of the factors of professional teaching.  
-TC KR

Another teacher candidate shared that his experience in the program was "rough" because he had to spend time on tasks he did not find necessary:

Basically we had to put together, um, you know, we had to put together a unit-of three lessons. And, basically, tell- give a breakdown of what we would do in that particular unit. But it's- it's the thing that we- we had so much other stuff to do, to the point where you just kind of go through the motions with- with these, uh, with these, uh, tasks to where we don't see the point in them, so- we're- because we have so much other stuff to *do* in the program it would all be like kind of piled up together to where it's just like- just like I don't want to put my *full* effort into it when I'm not going to get out of what I *should* get out of it.  
-TC TH

Similarly, a different candidate felt some of the coursework did not match the reality of a classroom environment:

Um, the program's vision is on advocacy and diversity, and teaching tolerance. So, it wanted us to focus on social justice and multiculturalism. Which is, fantastic, but it's also unrealistic to teach in every single lesson and every single day in a classroom where students *aren't* familiar with any of that.  
-TC XV

These responses highlight a shared desire for program requirements that are focused more on the practical aspects of teaching so that their limited time is spent in ways that will give them the most experience.

## **Reflection**

Teaching candidates communicated that they were more reflective and self-aware as a result of the teaching credential program, qualities which were viewed as helpful. For example, "My goal is to be better every single day, and the way I can do that is continue

to grow, and reflect on my teaching so that I can be better (TC SS). Another candidate shared, "I think I've grown a lot to be like, effective. I think the program definitely helped me. I'm educated and have become reflective of whatever I've done in my lessons" (TC NM).

One participant felt reflection strengthened his confidence and reported having the opportunity to reflect on his teaching practices by re-watching recordings of his lessons,

I'm a big person of like- I'm a visual learner, so watching myself teach in that aspect of, like seeing a video of myself and what I did and didn't do, and reflecting on it was a big help.

-TC TH

In summary, teacher candidates interviewed desired mentor qualities such as flexibility, shared understanding, and collaboration. Interviewees all felt their professional development helped prepare them to teach, and they reported the hands-on experiences, a moderate workload, and practicing reflection related most to their confidence for teaching and classroom management.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how age, grade level and measures of self-efficacy were related in student teaching candidates. In addition, the study investigated the student-mentor relationship from the student's perspective to better understand which mentor qualities strengthen self-efficacy and potentially minimize burnout. Finally, this study focused on the aspects of the teacher credentialing program teaching candidates felt increased their self-efficacy.

There is strong support in the literature for the relationship between enacted experiences and self-efficacy. Therefore, the researcher expected to find a similar relationship between fieldwork training and self-efficacy for classroom management. Demographic variables such as student teacher age and grade level taught were also considered as potential influences on student teacher self-efficacy.

The current study found that there was a positive relationship between student teachers with high confidence for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues and Principals. These data are related to Bandura's (2001) assertion that people with high self-efficacy tend to expect positive outcomes, and are therefore also more likely to behave confidently. Bandura (1997) also suggests that while self-efficacy beliefs are always changing, a person acts according to how they are feeling in that moment. The relationship in these findings suggests that teacher candidates are more

likely to ask for help when they feel confident in themselves as an educator. It is also a reflection of the bi-directional influence of the student-mentor relationship.

Teacher candidates who taught in a lower grade level reported the highest levels self-efficacy for both classroom management and eliciting support. There is also support in the literature that teachers of younger students are less likely to experience burnout (Brunsting, Sreckovic & Lane, 2014; Sass et al., 2012). The curriculum for middle and high school students is reasonably more complicated, and so the workload is going to look very different for a teacher in an elementary school classroom. Teacher candidates were also asked on the survey whether they had an interest in the grade level they were teaching, and five candidates responded "yes", three responded "no", one responded "unknown", and one responded "not necessarily", indicating no significant connection between interest in grade level and self-efficacy.

Additionally, older participants tended to have higher self-efficacy for classroom management and eliciting support from colleagues than did the younger participants. This is consistent with prior research findings that as age increased, self-efficacy for teaching also increased (Brunsting, Sreckovic & Lane, 2014; Sass et al., 2012). Older students might have more teaching and/or general professional experiences and are perhaps better able to adapt to novel situations. This finding is not as significant as the relationship found between the other variables; however, training programs might consider this when mentoring their teacher candidates.

The qualitative data revealed a few major themes related to the mentor qualities that shape student teacher self-efficacy. First, participants stated a clear preference for flexibility overall. It is clear from the findings that teacher candidates want more autonomy. All of the participants interviewed enjoyed mentor teachers who allowed them to try out different teaching methods versus adhering to one style throughout the semester. Statements like, "She allowed me to do a lot of things *my* way, and so it helped me create my own teacher outfit in a sense", and "Having the staff there willing to work with us, and kind of change their schedule up a bit for us, really made the program much simpler and smoother to truly understand the grasp of teaching in an everyday classroom" help to explain how mentor flexibility positively affects student teacher self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is internally regulated by the individual, yet it is also shaped through experiences with others (Gredler, 2009). Mentors can help their students learn as well as develop confidence by allowing them to direct their own learning as it pertains to their own individual needs.

The teacher candidates preferred mentors who had gone through the same program they were currently in, as those mentors understood best how to help them. This is similar to Bandura's (1997) assertion that vicarious experiences strengthen self-efficacy more when the person modeling a target behavior shares similarities to the observer. Mentors who were already familiar with the program were viewed as having more credibility. This finding is important for teaching credential programs to consider when pairing teacher candidates with a mentor. It should also be considered that familiarity alone does not influence a person's beliefs; a mentor familiar with the program

requirements must still make time to share ideas through discourse in order to co-create a shared understanding. One participant provided an example of how only observing her mentor made her feel less supported, "Um, because we didn't get a lot of time to kind of get to know each other. Um, and I- like I said because you know all the limited time she got to see me um- um- instruct I don't think she knew where to support me in those areas, meaning can you support me um, in helping me construct um, curriculum in the first two weeks I was there you know in January, um or can you tell me more about your classroom routine I think she expected me to just to obs- you know be in there for a week and know exactly how everything works." This student felt observation alone resulted in conflicting understandings. Therefore, it is important for mentor teachers to make time for further discussion in order to check for mutual understanding.

Participants interviewed also stated a desire for mentors who actively engaged with them. Active engagement was related to student teacher self-efficacy. When subjective interpretation of productivity met participant's expectations, participants also viewed their mentors as helpful. To meet the unique needs of the learner it is more effective for mentors to help problem-solve and co-create ideas in real time. For example, one participant stated, "The more I know the more I am able to, you know, grow and meet the needs of students. I know I've had my Principal come in and observe me and give me points and tips, those things that I haven't necessarily thought about, and then be able to apply those, you know, ideas in my teaching the very next day." Mentors should be open to a fluid working relationship instead of using a more directive coaching style. Similarly, prior research on teacher training and novice teacher's career intentions found

that more comprehensive mentor support was related to the intention of staying (DeAngelis, Wall & Che, 2013; Devereaux et al., 2010; Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011), therefore it is important that mentors are in fact making the time to collaborate with their students.

Interview data indicated preservice education and training influences teacher candidate confidence overall, but only when teacher candidates perceived their time was spent performing tasks that were relevant to applied teaching practices. Participants did not feel the course material prepared them to teach as well as their own experiences did. Enacted experiences have the greatest influence on self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Butz & Usher, 2015; Malinen et al., 2013), therefore it is not surprising that the teacher candidates in this study strongly felt their teaching experiences helped developed their self-efficacy the most.

Time constraints were a common theme among interviewees. Participants described several instances in which they felt they were wasting time. Perceived meaningfulness of assignments shapes student teacher attitudes about program quality and effectiveness (Bandura, 1997). One study on teacher preparation programs discovered that teacher candidates prefer clear examples and explanations of assignments and felt time was not spent well when material was repetitive, unclear, or irrelevant (Devereaux et al., 2010). All of the teacher candidates interviewed in this study also felt some of the course assignments were repetitive and unnecessary. The main reason for this was that they felt their time was so limited to get everything done. A demanding workload is often named as a factor in teacher attrition (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Sass et

al., 2012), therefore these attitudes reveal that despite the previous discoveries mentioned current program practices continue to demand completion or work viewed as too excessive by its students.

A final theme that emerged from the qualitative data was that of reflection. When asked if they felt they had changed as a result of participation in the teaching credential program, all teacher candidates felt their experiences overall helped them develop the skills they need to succeed as teachers. One particular practice interviewees developed throughout their training was the act of reflection. Whether teacher candidates engaged in reflective discourse with another or simply practiced self-awareness alone the effect was that reflecting helped them grow, which in turn made them feel better about their teaching abilities. Mentors have the unique position of co-creating understandings with their students. Incorporating mindfulness as a practice during student training might help students cognitively reappraise any negative situations into an opportunity for learning and growth.

Collaboration is a strong resource for building confidence. Each participant perceived the support they received in different ways depending on their age, grade level taught, teaching experiences, and the quality of collaboration with their cooperating mentor teachers. Older teachers experienced greater self-efficacy and teacher candidates teaching lower grades had the highest self-efficacy compared to other grade levels taught. Mentors were viewed as effective when their expectations were flexible, they had prior knowledge of the program, and utilized a collaborative coaching style. Teacher candidates felt their time was wasted on certain course materials and preferred time spent

engaging in hands-on activities. Participants in this study reported they were more reflective and self-aware, which is a practice that made them feel more efficacious as a teacher. The data in this study showed that teacher candidate perceptions of support and self-efficacy have not changed much from the prior research, an important consideration for the development of future training protocols. Interviews provided insight into self-reported abilities by providing a deeper meaning behind training practices and personal beliefs. With this knowledge training programs might benefit from pairing students with a mentor who has completed the same training, limiting repetition of course materials covered, and provide additional support or resources for younger teachers and teachers in middle and high school classrooms.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study provides additional insight into teacher candidate attitudes about their mentor relationship not often discussed in-depth in the literature. It is reported that mentor support is desirable among student teachers yet there is little information about mentors engage with their students to foster confidence and persistence. Participants in this study offered specific examples of why collaboration was more helpful to their development as educators and offered ideas as to how the teacher credentialing program might be improved. Interview data allowed for a more complete understanding of survey data and what participants felt during fieldwork. Survey data cannot capture the mentor-student relationship in real time and is therefore limiting in some ways. First, interviews

took place after surveys were completed which lowers the validity of the data because attitudes are dynamic and possibly changed over one month, though likely not much in that short a time. Also, self-report data is one-sided so the responses are somewhat biased.

The setting of the data collection also affects participant responses, and in-person interviews might create a more intimate conversation than phone interviews. Fortunately, participants still shared candid and direct opinions that can be useful to the continued development of teaching credential programs.

Another limitation of this study was the small sample size, and therefore these results have limited generalizability. Results revealed some significant quantitative findings that need to be replicated in larger and diverse samples. The sample was also not large enough to detect small effect size and has low statistical power. However, these initial findings support that current California teaching credential curriculum standards can benefit from student evaluative feedback about distinctive program features.

### **Conclusions and Future Research**

The current study found that actual experience is associated with feelings of confidence and preparedness in student teachers. Mentor support moderates feelings of doubt and enriches understandings of teaching practices. Future research should involve ethnographic study and utilize direct observations of mentor-student relationships. This method establishes a framework for future studies to have greater validity as well as less

biased conclusions. Future questions should address how mentors create shared understandings of expectations with their students. In order to better measure how mentors are an integral part of shaping attitudes in learners, researchers must be able to observe, in real-time, how mentors and learners utilize tools, such as language, to negotiate meaning and form new ideas. Video-recorded observations of the micro processes that occur within this specific context as well as follow up interviews is a good model for a more accurate analysis of the student-mentor relationship. It would also be useful to measure mentor perceptions in order to learn how their perceptions might differ or match. The findings of such research can help those volunteering as mentor teachers better develop educational dialogue with their students.

## Appendix A

## Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. If a student disrupts the lesson, I am able to redirect him quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am able to approach principals if I want to talk about problems at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I am confident that, if necessary, I can ask my colleagues for advice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. There are very few students that I cannot handle.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I can get through to most difficult students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. When necessary, I am able to bring up problems with principals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I can always find colleagues with whom I can talk about problems at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I can take adequate measures that are necessary to keep activities running efficiently.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I can communicate to students that I am serious about getting appropriate behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I am not always able to execute several activities at once.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I can manage my class very well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I am confident that, if necessary, I can get principals to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I can keep defiant students involved in my lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I am always able to make my expectations clear to students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I am able to respond adequately to defiant students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. When it is necessary, I am able to get principals to support me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I can keep a few problem students from ruining an entire class.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. If students stop working, I can put them back on track.	1	2	3	4	5	6

19. I am confident that if necessary I can ask principals for advice.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6
20. If I feel confronted by a problem with which my colleagues can help me, I am able to approach them about this.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6
21. When it is necessary, I am able to ask a colleague for assistance.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6
22. I know what rules are appropriate for my students.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6
23. I am able to approach my colleagues if I want to talk about problems at work.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6
24. I am able to begin the scholastic year so that students will learn to behave well.  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol and Questions

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

*Purpose: What aspects of mentoring and education are related to self-efficacy?*

#### **Open Ended Research Questions and Sub Questions:**

1. Did your teacher training experience prepare you for teaching?
  - How so/tell me more?
2. What is your overall perception of your teaching credential program?
  - What do you like?
  - What do you dislike?
3. How do you feel about your mentor relationships?
  - What did you like/dislike?
4. Do you feel like you have changed in response to the professional development program?
  - If so, why?
  - Do you feel like you could have made these changes without the program?

**Thank the participant for their time. Assure him/her of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.**

**Closing Comments:**

## Appendix C

### Participant Recruitment Flyer

#### **ATTENTION STUDENT TEACHERS AND NEW TEACHERS**

I am a Graduate Student in the Child Development program at California State University, Sacramento. I'd like to invite you to participate in my research study investigating the culture of new teacher Induction Programs.

Your participation would involve completing a short survey and a brief audio-recorded interview.

Your participation in this project is **voluntary** and you can opt out at any time for any reason. Any personal information will remain **confidential**. If you have any questions about the research at any time, please contact me at [REDACTED]@gmail.com If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email [irb@csus.edu](mailto:irb@csus.edu).

Thank you so much for your time, I look forward to hearing from you! By clicking the link below you are consenting to participate in the study.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YPP36HB>

Lauren Nardozzi

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