



LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS, EDD

Graduate School of Education
University at Buffalo
State University of New York

A handbook for students in the Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts (LTSC) Doctor of Education (EdD) program within the Department of Learning and Instruction (LAI).

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Program Description & Outcomes

Designed with an actionable, justice-focused framework, the University at Buffalo's EdD in Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts integrates theory and practice through synergistic learning experiences to prepare education professionals to address emergent and persistent problems of practice. This applied, professional degree equips students to analyze challenges, develop solutions, and lead change in diverse educational contexts.

Graduates of the LTSC EdD program will be able to:

Research & Inquiry

- Analyze complex problems of practice to improve teaching, learning, and leadership.
- Design and conduct research that generates actionable solutions.
- Develop a Dissertation in Practice (DiP) that enhances professional practice.
- Use data to inform ethical leadership, policy, and instructional decisions.

Leadership & Change

- Drive positive change in local communities by applying research to real-world challenges.
- Collaborate with stakeholders across disciplines to strengthen educational systems.
- Lead organizational and instructional improvement in diverse educational settings.

Applied Impact

- Translate research into practical strategies for educators, policymakers, and organizations.
- Examine historical and contemporary influences on education and community well-being.
- Engage with experts and practitioners to foster innovation and equity.

Ethics & Professional Growth

- Uphold ethical standards in research, leadership, and practice.
- Cultivate professional networks to support lifelong learning and continuous impact.

Our Signature Pedagogies

The LTSC EdD program develops scholar-practitioners through a three-component signature pedagogy that integrates inquiry-based learning, equity-driven research, and transformative leadership. These pedagogies guide coursework and applied research, ensuring graduates develop the skills to address complex educational challenges and drive meaningful, sustainable change in their professional contexts.

Component	Description	Application in Program
Collaborative, Inquiry-Based Learning	Encourages critical inquiry, reflection, and dialogue to examine justice and equity in education. Students engage in problem-solving, research, and interdisciplinary learning to develop innovative approaches to educational challenges.	Year 1: Coursework centered on a Problem of Practice (PoP). Students define and explore real-world challenges, integrating theory with practice.
Equity-Driven, Field-Based Research	Develops equity-minded practitioners who apply critical analysis and data-driven decision-making to identify and address systemic inequities in education. Emphasizes institutional accountability and change-oriented research.	Year 2: Research methods courses equip students to develop practice-based solutions that generate real impact in schools, communities, and policy.
Generative, Transformative Leadership	Frames leadership as a tool for justice and democracy, emphasizing inclusive, ethical, and strategic decision-making. Prepares students to lead organizational change and implement sustainable improvements in education.	Year 3: Students complete a Dissertation in Practice (DiP), demonstrating scholarly rigor, applied leadership, and systemic impact.

Sample Curriculum Map

The LTSC EdD curriculum is structured across three years, integrating coursework, research methods, and Dissertation in Practice (DiP) milestones. The program consists of 60 required credits:

- 24 credits in Coursework Centering on a Problem of Practice (cc-PoP)
- 18 credits in Design & Research Methods for Improving Education (DRM)
- 18 credits in Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

Year	Summer	Fall	Spring
1	LAI 610 Introduction to Doctoral Studies (cc-PoP, 3) LAI 641 Survey of Education Research Methods (DRM, 3) Elective (cc-PoP, 3)	LAI 613 Curriculum Theory (cc-PoP, 3) LAI 669 Qualitative Techniques for Education (DRM, 3)	LAI 515 Action Research (DRM, 3) LAI 680 Writing Workshop (cc-PoP; 3) LAI 644 EdD Inquiry Practicum (DiP, 3) Prequalifying paper & defense due by end of Spring 1
2	LAI 621 Critical Interpretations of Research (DiP, 3) LAI 644 EdD Inquiry Practicum (DiP, 3) Elective (DRM, 3)	LAI 619 Qualitative Research Design (DRM, 3) Elective (cc-PoP, 3) Qualifying paper due by Fall 2, Week 4	LAI 620 Intersectionality & Equity (cc-PoP, 3) Elective (cc-PoP, 3) DiP proposal & defense due by end of Spring 2
3	LAI 626 Advanced Qual Methods (DRM, 3) LAI 702 Dissertation (DiP, 3) Elective (cc-PoP, 3)	LAI 702 Dissertation (DiP, 3)	LAI 702 Dissertation (DiP, 3) DiP findings & defense due by end of Spring 3

Is the EdD Right for Me?

The LTSC EdD program is designed to be accessible for working professionals who want to advance their education while continuing their careers. Unlike traditional doctoral programs that delay dissertation work until the final stage, our Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is embedded throughout coursework from Year 1 to Year 3. This structure ensures that students progressively build their DiP, integrating research with professional practice in a meaningful and manageable way.

EdD or PhD: Which Path is Right for You?

EdD (Doctor of Education)	PhD (Doctor of Philosophy)
Applied, professional degree focused on using research to solve real-world problems in education and related fields.	Research-intensive degree focused on developing new theoretical knowledge through academic study.
Prepares leaders across multiple sectors, including education, corporate training, nonprofits, public policy, healthcare, and government.	Prepares future faculty and researchers for careers in higher education and research institutions.
Designed for working professionals who need a structured, part-time program that integrates with their careers.	Full-time academic commitment, often requiring residency and research assistantships.
Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is embedded into coursework from Year 1, ensuring research is directly applicable and builds over time.	Traditional dissertation model, where research begins after coursework is completed.
Focuses on implementing solutions to address systemic challenges in organizations and communities.	Focuses on generating theoretical insights, contributing to scholarly discourse in the field.
Emphasizes leadership, change management, and applied research to make an immediate impact.	Emphasizes academic publishing, theory development, and teaching at the university level.
Broadly applicable across various fields—education is seen as a social practice that occurs in multiple contexts, not just schools.	Primarily focused on K-12 and higher education, with research often limited to academic settings.

Program Milestones: A Path to the DiP

The LTSC EdD program integrates the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) into coursework from Year 1, ensuring students develop their research incrementally with faculty support. Each milestone refines the Problem of Practice (PoP) into a rigorous, practitioner-focused dissertation. The milestone progression is outlined below.

Prequalifying Paper (Pre-QP) → Becomes DiP Chapter 1

Students begin with the prequalifying paper, a 10-page essay due at the end of Spring 1, in which they define their PoP. This paper establishes the foundation of their research, articulating the significance of the issue and key research questions. After faculty evaluation and a successful defense, this paper becomes the foundation for Chapter 1 of the DiP.

Qualifying Paper (QP) → Becomes DiP Chapter 2

Building on the prequalifying paper foundation, the qualifying paper expands the research by incorporating background analysis and a methodology overview. Due by Fall 2, Week 4, this milestone refines the PoP while demonstrating the feasibility of the proposed study. The successful defense of the qualifying paper marks students' readiness to propose independent research and formally establishes the first two chapter drafts of their DiP.

DiP Proposal Defense → Covers DiP Chapters 1-3

The proposal defense, due by the end of Spring 2, requires students to refine and integrate Chapters 1 through 3 of their DiP, formally presenting their research design and methodology. This stage includes a written proposal, a pre-recorded presentation, and a synchronous oral defense. A successful defense enables students to move forward with data collection and analysis.

DiP Findings → Finalizes Chapters 1-4

During Year 3, students conduct their research, analyze findings, and complete Chapters 3 and 4 of the DiP. At this stage, the dissertation consists of four key chapters: Chapter 1 introduces the PoP, research questions, and purpose; Chapter 2 provides a background analysis; Chapter 3 details the investigative approach and methodology; and Chapter 4 presents findings, implications, and recommendations.

DiP Findings Defense → Final Step

The final milestone is the Dissertation in Practice defense, which occurs in Spring 3. Students submit their completed DiP Chapters 1-4 and present their findings through a written submission, a live or recorded presentation, and a synchronous oral defense. This defense serves as the culminating evaluation of their ability to conduct applied, practitioner-driven research that leads to meaningful change in education and social contexts.

DiP Research Pathways

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is a research project designed to address a Problem of Practice (PoP) in an applied, real-world educational or social context. Unlike a traditional Ph.D. dissertation, which aims to contribute new theoretical knowledge, the DiP focuses on generating practical, research-based solutions that improve teaching, learning, and leadership in diverse settings.

Three Research Pathways

Students choose one of the following research approaches to guide their DiP:

1. **Exploration Study** – Investigates the underlying causes and contributing factors of a Problem of Practice. This pathway is ideal for understanding gaps in teaching and learning, barriers to student success, or institutional challenges.
 - Example: Examining how elementary teachers perceive and implement differentiated instruction to support multilingual learners and identifying professional development needs.
2. **Intervention/Innovation Study** – Involves designing, implementing, and assessing an educational strategy, program, or instructional method to address a Problem of Practice. This pathway often includes action research or program evaluation.
 - Example: Developing and testing a professional learning community model for high school math teachers to improve student engagement and conceptual understanding of algebra.
3. **Outcomes Study** – Evaluates the effectiveness of an existing program, policy, or instructional practice. This pathway measures impact, determines best practices, and offers recommendations for improvement.
 - Example: Analyzing the impact of inquiry-based science instruction on middle school students' critical thinking skills and scientific literacy.

What is a Problem of Practice?

A PoP is a real-world, practice-based challenge that impacts teaching, learning, or educational leadership. Unlike broad theoretical research questions, a PoP is directly observable, actionable, and situated within a specific educational context. It serves as the foundation for research in the EdD program, guiding students toward applied solutions that lead to meaningful improvements in education.

Key Characteristics of a Problem of Practice:

- **Context-Specific** – It occurs within a particular learning environment, such as a school, district, or educational organization.
 - Example: Declining student engagement in high school science courses despite curriculum changes.
- **Actionable** – It can be addressed through research-informed strategies or interventions.
 - Example: Examining how peer mentoring programs support first-generation college students in adapting to academic challenges.
- **Grounded in Evidence** – It is supported by data, observations, or documented concerns rather than personal opinions.
 - Example: A district's assessment data shows multilingual learners consistently score lower in reading comprehension, highlighting a need for targeted instructional strategies.
- **Connected to Equity & Justice** – It often focuses on addressing disparities in educational access, outcomes, and experiences.
 - Example: Investigating why disciplinary actions disproportionately impact Black and Latinx students in urban middle schools.

To define a PoP, consider:

- What needs improvement in the educational setting?
- Who is affected, and how?
- What evidence supports that this is a persistent issue?
- What factors contribute to the problem?

Connecting the PoP to the Dissertation in Practice

A well-defined Problem of Practice serves as the foundation for the DiP. It informs the research design, intervention strategies, and analysis, ensuring the study leads to practical, research-based solutions that enhance learning and teaching.

Department of Learning and Instruction
Initial Course Plan Statement (ICPS)

This form is for students in the Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts EdD program.

Student Information

Name _____
Person # _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Program Milestone Information

Semester of Acceptance Summer _____ Fall _____ Spring _____
Prequalifying Paper Date Semester _____ Date (MM/DD/YY) _____
Qualifying Paper Date Semester _____ Date (MM/DD/YY) _____
Proposal Defense Date Semester _____ Date (MM/DD/YY) _____
DiP Defense Date Semester _____ Date (MM/DD/YY) _____

Program Credit Hours Information

Stage & Required Credits	# of Credits Based on Information provided on p. 2
Coursework Centering on a Problem of Practice (cc-PoP) 24 credits required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAI 613 Curriculum Theory (3 credits) • 21 elective credits selected in consultation with Advisor 	
Design and Research Methods for Improving Education (DRM) 18 credits required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAI 515 Action Research (3 credits) • 15 elective credits selected in consultation with Advisor 	
Dissertation in Practice (DiP) 18 credits required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAI 621 Critical Interpretations of Research (3 credits) • LAI 644 EdD Inquiry Practicum (6 credits) • LAI 702 Dissertation (9 credits) 	
Total Credits 60 credits required	

List Doctoral Courses to be Counted Toward the 60-Hour Minimum EdD Degree

Coursework Centering on a Problem of Practice (cc-PoP) <i>24 credits required</i>					
Dept. Abbreviation & Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Grade	Instructor	Semester & Year to be Registered
1. LAI 613	Curriculum Theory	3			
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
TOTAL CREDITS IN CC-POP					
Design and Research Methods for Improving Education (DRM) <i>18 credits required</i>					
Dept. Abbreviation & Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Grade	Instructor	Semester & Year to be Registered
1. LAI 515	Action Research	3			
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
TOTAL CREDITS IN DRM					
Dissertation in Practice (DiP) <i>18 credits required</i>					
Dept. Abbreviation & Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Grade	Instructor	Semester & Year to be Registered
1. LAI 621	Critical Interpretations of Research	3			
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
TOTAL CREDITS IN DiP					

Signatures

Student's Name (Printed)

Student's Name (Signature)

Date

Advisor's Name (Printed)

Advisor's Name (Signature)

Date

Program Director's Name (Printed)

Student's Name (Signature)

Date

EdD Dissertation in Practice Committee Policy

The EdD Dissertation in Practice (DiP) committee plays a crucial role in guiding students through the research and writing process, ensuring that their work meets the program's scholarly and applied research standards. The committee provides mentorship, feedback, and evaluation as students develop their DiP, from identifying a Problem of Practice to the final defense.

Committee Structure & Requirements (Updated Fall 2024)

The EdD DiP committee must include at least two members from the UB Graduate Faculty:

- **Major Professor (Committee Chair):** A UB Graduate Faculty member who serves as the student's primary advisor and mentor throughout the dissertation process.
- **Second Faculty Member:** Must be an Associate or Full Member of the UB Graduate Faculty, providing additional guidance and expertise.

Students may add an optional third committee member for further guidance and support, but this is not required. Additional members can be included if their expertise aligns with the student's research focus.

Committee Responsibilities

- **Prequalifying & Qualifying Papers:** Committee members guide students through the early research stages, ensuring their Problem of Practice and research design are well-founded.
- **DiP Proposal Defense:** The committee evaluates the dissertation proposal (DiP Chapters 1-3), ensuring feasibility and rigor before granting approval to proceed with research.
- **DiP Support & Feedback:** Faculty provide ongoing mentorship, helping students refine their methodology, analyze data, and articulate findings.
- **Final DiP Defense:** The committee evaluates the completed DiP (Chapters 1-4) and determines whether the student successfully meets the program's requirements for applied research excellence.

Students are encouraged to proactively engage with their committee members, seeking regular feedback and utilizing their expertise to enhance the quality and impact of their research.

Sample DiP Outline

What follows is a sample Dissertation in Practice (DiP) outline designed to illustrate the structure, depth, and scope of a high-quality EdD dissertation. This sample provides a clear framework for how a Problem of Practice (PoP) is identified, analyzed, and addressed through applied research.

The DiP follows a structured progression, beginning with Chapter 1: Introduction, which establishes the PoP, presents relevant literature, and outlines research questions. Chapter 2: Background Analysis contextualizes the study within existing research, highlighting theoretical and conceptual foundations. Chapter 3: Investigative Approach details the research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Chapter 4: Findings and Implications presents the results and discusses how the study informs practice, policy, and future research.

This sample dissertation examines peer mentoring's impact on first-year teachers' self-efficacy through a mixed-methods design incorporating quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations. It demonstrates how to apply Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Vygotsky's social learning theory to real-world educational challenges.

By following this structure, students ensure that their DiP meets scholarly standards while maintaining a practical focus on solving educational problems. This sample serves as a model for structuring research, writing effectively, and aligning findings with professional applications in education.

Title Page

**Bridging the Confidence Gap:
Examining the Impact of Peer Mentoring on
First-Year Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

Tiffany Karalis Noel

A Dissertation in Practice submitted to the
Graduate School, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts
Department of Learning and Instruction.

Abstract

Teacher attrition remains a critical issue in U.S. education, with nearly 44% of new teachers leaving the profession within five years, often due to a lack of adequate support. This Dissertation in Practice examines how structured peer mentoring influences first-year teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement within Lincoln School District, where 38% of new teachers leave within three years. Grounded in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory, this study employs a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design to first measure self-efficacy shifts through quantitative surveys and then explore the mentoring experiences driving these changes through qualitative data. The quantitative phase utilized pre- and post-program Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) surveys (n=20) to assess changes in teacher confidence over an academic year. The qualitative phase included semi-structured interviews (n=15) and classroom observations (n=30) across three schools—Garcia Elementary, Douglass Middle School, and Okafor High School—to understand how mentoring shaped teacher development. Findings indicate that structured peer mentoring enhances teacher self-efficacy by fostering collaborative reflection, instructional modeling, and emotional reassurance. However, inconsistent mentor availability, lack of dedicated mentoring time, and mentor workload constraints limited effectiveness. To improve program outcomes, this study recommends integrating mentoring into the school schedule, reducing mentor workload, implementing targeted mentor training, and extending mentorship beyond the first year. These findings offer practical, research-driven strategies to strengthen teacher induction, improve retention, and institutionalize peer mentoring as a core component of professional development.

Keywords: *peer mentoring, teacher self-efficacy, first-year teachers, professional development, teacher retention, mixed-methods research*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

- Overview of the chapter's purpose
- Introduction to the problem of practice (PoP)
- Justification for the study

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study's focus on enhancing first-year teachers' self-efficacy through peer mentoring and to establish why this problem warrants investigation. Many novice teachers struggle with classroom management, instructional planning, and professional confidence, contributing to high attrition rates (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to succeed—is a key predictor of teacher effectiveness and retention (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), yet existing support structures, such as traditional mentorship programs, often lack sustained collaboration and peer-driven learning (Rockoff, 2008). This Dissertation in Practice (DiP) examines whether structured peer mentoring can strengthen self-efficacy by fostering professional dialogue, skill development, and emotional support. By situating this problem within both the broader educational landscape and the specific context of Lincoln School District, this study provides insights to improve teacher induction programs and early-career support...

Problem of Practice (PoP) Statement

- Broad societal problem
- Evidence of the problem in research literature
- Manifestation of the problem in the candidate's local context
- Purpose of the study and its significance

Teacher attrition rates remain alarmingly high, particularly within the first five years of teaching, with studies indicating that lack of support is a leading cause (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Research has consistently shown that teachers with lower self-efficacy are more likely to leave the profession, often due to challenges in classroom management, instructional delivery, and student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Despite efforts to address these challenges through induction and mentorship programs, many new teachers still report feeling isolated and unsupported (Rockoff, 2008). At Lincoln School District, 38% of first-year teachers leave within their first three years, citing limited professional development and inconsistent mentorship structures. This study examines whether structured peer mentoring can enhance self-efficacy among first-year teachers by fostering professional dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and emotional support. Findings from this study will inform

district leaders and policymakers seeking practical strategies to strengthen teacher induction programs and improve early-career retention...

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

- Purpose statement explaining the study's objectives
- Research questions guiding the study
- Alignment of research questions with the PoP

The purpose of this study is to examine how participation in a structured peer mentoring program influences first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement. Rather than focusing on hierarchical mentorship models, this study explores a peer-driven approach, where first-year teachers collaborate with experienced educators in a reciprocal learning process.

The central research question guiding this study is:

How does participation in a structured peer mentoring program impact first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs over the course of an academic year?

Sub-questions include:

1. *How do first-year teachers describe their experiences with peer mentoring?*
2. *What aspects of peer mentoring contribute most to changes in self-efficacy beliefs?*
3. *How do peer mentors perceive their role in supporting new teachers?*

By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide practical insights for Lincoln School District on how peer mentoring can serve as a sustainable, structured approach to supporting novice educators...

Study Context

- Description of the local setting and organizational environment
- Equity and justice implications within the local context
- Feasibility of the study given organizational constraints

This study took place in three public schools within Lincoln School District: Garcia Elementary, Douglass Middle School, and Okafor High School. These schools were selected due to their high rates of early-career teacher attrition and their participation in a pilot peer mentoring initiative. Although the broader Lincoln School District context informs this research, data collection was limited to these three schools to provide a focused, in-depth analysis of peer

mentoring within specific instructional settings. Each school represents a unique set of challenges and mentoring structures: Garcia Elementary serves a predominantly bilingual student body, with high attrition among early-career teachers working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Douglass Middle School has historically struggled with retaining first-year teachers, with many citing limited instructional support as a key concern. Okafor High School is one of the largest secondary schools in the district, yet inconsistent mentoring structures have resulted in widely varying experiences among first-year teachers. By analyzing the peer mentoring program within these schools, this study evaluates whether structured mentorship improves first-year teacher self-efficacy and retention in diverse instructional settings...

Significance of the Study

- Explanation of the study's importance in addressing the PoP
- Key stakeholders and potential benefits of findings
- Broader impact on practice and policy

This study is significant because it addresses a longstanding challenge in teacher induction—ensuring that new educators receive sustained, meaningful professional support. While previous research highlights the benefits of mentorship, many programs lack the structure or frequency necessary to improve teacher self-efficacy. Findings from this study will be valuable for school administrators seeking to refine their teacher support programs, district policymakers exploring sustainable mentorship models, and teacher preparation programs aiming to better equip educators for the transition to full-time teaching. If peer mentoring is found to enhance self-efficacy, school leaders may consider integrating structured mentorship as a formal component of new teacher induction, ensuring that all first-year teachers have access to ongoing professional collaboration and support...

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework (Brief Overview)

- Introduction to relevant theories and models
- How theoretical perspectives shape the study's approach (detailed analysis in Chapter 2)

Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory provides a foundational lens for this study, emphasizing how mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social persuasion contribute to teacher confidence. Research suggests that new teachers who experience early professional successes, observe effective teaching models, and receive encouragement from peers are more likely to develop strong self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory supports the role of peer collaboration in professional growth,

suggesting that new teachers benefit from structured, guided interactions with experienced educators. This study also draws upon the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (Collins et al., 1991), which suggests that novice teachers develop expertise through guided practice, reflection, and structured mentorship. These theoretical perspectives provide insight into how peer mentoring may enhance self-efficacy among first-year teachers...

Methodological Overview (Brief Overview)

- General research approach (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods)
- Key data sources and collection methods
- Feasibility considerations

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to examine how a structured peer mentoring program influenced first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. By using multiple data sources, this approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact over the course of an academic year. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-program surveys measuring changes in self-efficacy levels among first-year teachers. These surveys assessed teachers' confidence in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement using validated self-efficacy scales. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with both first-year teachers and their peer mentors. These interviews provided insight into teachers' experiences, perceived benefits of the mentoring program, and challenges encountered during the process. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to document how mentoring interactions influenced instructional practices and professional growth. Observations focused on changes in teacher behaviors, instructional decision-making, and engagement with students over time. The study was conducted within Lincoln School District, involving 20 first-year teachers and their assigned peer mentors across three schools. The mixed-methods approach allowed for a rich and multidimensional analysis, ensuring that the findings captured both measurable changes in self-efficacy and the lived experiences of participants in the peer mentoring program...

Chapter Summary and Roadmap

- Summary of key points in Chapter 1
- Preview of upcoming chapters

This chapter introduced the problem of practice, the study's purpose and significance, and an overview of the research methodology. It framed the study within existing research on teacher self-efficacy and mentorship and provided an overview of the study's theoretical foundation. Additionally, it outlined the study's mixed-methods approach, which included surveys,

interviews, and classroom observations to assess the impact of peer mentoring on first-year teachers' self-efficacy. Chapter 2 will present a background analysis, situating the PoP within the broader educational research landscape. It will examine existing literature on peer mentoring, self-efficacy, and teacher induction, providing further insight into how this study contributes to the ongoing conversation about improving early-career teacher support. Chapter 3 will outline the investigative approach, detailing the research design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures used in the study. It will describe how quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed to explore changes in first-year teachers' self-efficacy and the perceived impact of peer mentoring. Chapter 4 will present the findings and implications of the study, synthesizing the results of the surveys, interviews, and observations. It will highlight key trends, patterns, and participant perspectives, offering practical recommendations for strengthening peer mentoring programs in teacher induction. The chapter will also discuss implications for educational practice and policy, considering how these findings can inform future mentoring initiatives and district-wide teacher support strategies...

Chapter 2: Background Analysis

Introduction

- Overview of the chapter's purpose
- Chapter 2 roadmap

This chapter situates the problem of first-year teacher self-efficacy within the broader educational research landscape by examining relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies that inform how peer mentoring may serve as a structured intervention. While Chapter 1 established the need for peer mentoring as a tool for supporting new teachers, this chapter focuses on what existing research tells us about self-efficacy development, mentoring models, and teacher retention. First, it explores national and global concerns related to first-year teacher self-efficacy, emphasizing how structural and policy-related factors contribute to high attrition rates. Next, it introduces theoretical perspectives that provide a foundation for understanding how self-efficacy is shaped through peer mentoring. The chapter then examines empirical studies on mentoring programs, analyzing their impact on new teacher confidence, instructional effectiveness, and retention. Finally, it connects these research insights to Lincoln School District's local context, considering how the district's existing mentorship efforts compare to documented best practices. This background analysis establishes a research-based rationale for exploring peer mentoring as a viable, scalable approach to improving first-year teacher self-efficacy...

Orientation Within the Larger Educational Landscape

- The problem at a national and global scale
- Broader policy, social, and historical implications
- Challenges and barriers to supporting first-year teachers

First-year teacher self-efficacy is a pressing issue in education, with research consistently showing that low confidence in instructional abilities, student engagement, and classroom management contributes to early-career burnout and attrition (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Nationally, 44% of new teachers leave the profession within five years, largely due to insufficient professional support and the overwhelming transition from teacher preparation programs to independent classroom instruction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Policymakers have responded with various teacher induction and mentorship programs, yet research suggests that many of these initiatives are inconsistently implemented and fail to provide sustained, collaborative learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, systemic barriers such as time constraints, lack of mentor training, and inequitable access to professional development further limit the effectiveness of traditional mentorship models

(Rockoff, 2008). As school districts continue to refine teacher induction strategies, peer mentoring has emerged as a promising approach that fosters ongoing, reciprocal professional support, positioning first-year teachers as active participants in their own development (Hobson et al., 2009). This study examines whether peer mentoring in Lincoln School District aligns with these documented national and global trends, exploring how a structured, collaborative approach can address the specific challenges new teachers face in this district...

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

- Key theories that inform the study
- How theoretical perspectives shape the study's approach
- Justification for the chosen framework(s)

This study is grounded in three key theories that explain how self-efficacy develops and how peer mentoring can support early-career teachers. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory provides a lens for understanding how mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social persuasion shape a teacher's confidence in their ability to succeed. When first-year teachers engage in peer mentoring, they gain direct teaching successes (mastery), observe experienced colleagues in action (vicarious learning), and receive encouragement from their mentors (social persuasion)—all of which contribute to higher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory supports the idea that professional growth is most effective in a collaborative, social context where novice teachers can engage in guided interactions with peers. Through structured peer mentoring, new teachers receive real-time feedback, engage in shared problem-solving, and develop a stronger sense of professional identity. Finally, the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (Collins et al., 1991) suggests that novices learn best when guided by experienced mentors through modeling, scaffolding, and reflective practice. Unlike traditional mentorship models, which often position the mentor as the expert, peer mentoring fosters a reciprocal learning dynamic, where both the mentor and mentee engage in shared reflection and professional development. These theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for examining how peer mentoring influences self-efficacy among first-year teachers at Lincoln School District...

Review of Empirical Research

- What research tells us about self-efficacy in first-year teachers
- Studies on teacher mentoring models and their effectiveness
- How research informs this study's examination of Lincoln School District

Empirical research provides strong evidence that teacher self-efficacy is a key factor in retention, instructional effectiveness, and overall job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2011).

However, self-efficacy is not static—it develops through real-world teaching experiences, structured professional support, and opportunities for reflection (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Studies on teacher induction programs highlight the critical role of mentorship, yet findings suggest that traditional, hierarchical mentorship structures often fail to meet new teachers' needs for sustained, peer-driven collaboration (Rockoff, 2008). Research on peer mentoring as an alternative model indicates that it can enhance teacher confidence, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve instructional skill development (Hobson et al., 2009). In one study, teachers who participated in structured peer mentoring reported higher self-efficacy levels and stronger classroom management skills compared to those in traditional mentor-mentee relationships (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Another study found that first-year teachers who engaged in collaborative mentoring relationships felt more supported and were more likely to persist in the profession (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). This body of research informs how peer mentoring may serve as a more dynamic, sustainable model for supporting new teachers, guiding this study's examination of Lincoln School District's peer mentoring program...

Perspectives from Stakeholders and Local Context

- Administrator and teacher perspectives on mentoring
- Existing mentorship structures in Lincoln School District
- Understanding challenges within the district

Lincoln School District has implemented various mentorship initiatives in an effort to support first-year teachers, yet internal data suggest that these programs may not fully address new teacher concerns. A 2021 district-wide survey revealed that 72% of first-year teachers felt underprepared for classroom management, 64% expressed interest in structured peer mentoring, and only 38% reported receiving meaningful guidance from their assigned mentor. Administrator interviews indicated that mentorship assignments were often informal, leaving some new teachers without consistent support. Additionally, district data show that teacher attrition remains high, with 38% of new teachers leaving within three years, a pattern that reflects national trends. These findings suggest a disconnect between existing mentorship structures and teacher needs, reinforcing the importance of investigating whether structured peer mentoring can provide a more effective, equitable approach. By comparing Lincoln School District's mentorship experiences with best practices identified in the research literature, this study seeks to determine how peer mentoring can be leveraged as a strategy for improving self-efficacy and retention among early-career teachers...

Summary and Contributions of the Dissertation in Practice

- Recap of key insights from the background analysis

- How the study applies existing research to a practical setting
- Transition to Chapter 3

This chapter situated the problem of practice within the broader educational research landscape, demonstrating how first-year teacher self-efficacy is influenced by national policy trends, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings on teacher mentorship. It explored key theoretical frameworks, including self-efficacy theory, social learning theory, and cognitive apprenticeship, to establish how peer mentoring may support teacher development. A review of empirical research highlighted the benefits and limitations of different mentorship models, reinforcing the rationale for studying structured peer mentoring. Finally, stakeholder perspectives and local district data revealed critical gaps in existing mentorship efforts at Lincoln School District, underscoring the need for a more collaborative and sustainable approach. Chapter 3 will outline the investigative approach, detailing the research design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures used to examine how peer mentoring impacted first-year teacher self-efficacy...

Chapter 3: Investigative Approach

Introduction

- Overview of the chapter's purpose
- Chapter 3 roadmap

This chapter details the investigative approach used to examine the impact of structured peer mentoring on first-year teachers' self-efficacy. It provides a comprehensive description of the research design, explaining how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to answer the research questions. The chapter begins by restating the research questions and justifying the methodological approach in relation to the study's objectives. It then discusses researcher positionality, study context, participant recruitment, data sources, and data collection procedures, ensuring transparency in the study's execution. The data analysis process is outlined, including thematic coding for qualitative data and statistical comparisons for quantitative data. The chapter concludes with trustworthiness and ethical considerations to ensure rigor and integrity in findings. By the end of this chapter, the reader should have a clear understanding of how the study was conducted and how the findings presented in Chapter 4 were derived...

Restatement of the Research Questions

- Primary research question
- Sub-questions guiding data collection and analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine how participation in a structured peer mentoring program influenced first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement.

The central research question guiding this study was:

How does participation in a structured peer mentoring program impact first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs over the course of an academic year?

Sub-questions included:

1. *How do first-year teachers describe their experiences with peer mentoring?*
2. *What aspects of peer mentoring contribute most to changes in self-efficacy beliefs?*
3. *How do peer mentors perceive their role in supporting new teachers?*

By addressing these questions, the study sought to provide practical insights into whether structured peer mentoring fosters professional growth and confidence among first-year teachers...

Methodology: Described and Justified in Relation to the Research Questions

- Explanation of mixed-methods approach
- Justification for selecting qualitative and quantitative methods

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design to examine how structured peer mentoring influenced first-year teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement. This approach, which begins with a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase, was chosen to first measure what changes occurred in self-efficacy and then explore why and how those changes happened. The quantitative phase addressed the primary research question by providing statistical evidence of self-efficacy shifts over time. However, quantitative data alone could not explain the mentoring experiences that contributed to these changes. The qualitative phase addressed the study's sub-questions, offering insight into how mentees and mentors perceived the program and which aspects were most impactful. A sequential explanatory design was ideal because it ensured that qualitative findings were directly informed by quantitative results, allowing for a deeper understanding of key patterns. This integration provided both empirical validation and practical insights, making the study's findings both measurable and actionable for Lincoln School District....

Researcher's Positionality

- Researcher's background and expertise
- Relationship to the study and motivation for conducting the research

As a former K-12 educator and professional development facilitator, my background includes firsthand experience supporting early-career teachers through mentorship programs and instructional coaching. Throughout my career, I have worked with new teachers facing challenges in classroom management, instructional planning, and self-efficacy, which shaped my interest in studying mentorship as a potential solution to these persistent issues. My relationship to this study is both academic and professional—I sought to investigate a structured, research-based approach to peer mentoring while acknowledging my prior beliefs about the benefits of mentorship. My familiarity with teacher induction programs helped me develop meaningful research questions and interview protocols, but I also remained aware of the need to be mindful of how my personal experiences had the potential to influence data

interpretation. Maintaining this transparency helped ensure that the study's findings were grounded in participant experiences rather than my own assumptions...

Study Context

- Description of where participants were recruited
- Relevance of the study site to the problem of practice

This study took place in three public schools within Lincoln School District, a mid-sized urban district serving approximately 12,000 students. The schools selected for participation were Garcia Elementary, Douglass Middle School, and Okafor High School, all of which implemented a structured peer mentoring program as part of the district's broader teacher induction efforts. These schools represent a range of student populations, instructional settings, and professional challenges, making them ideal for analyzing how peer mentoring impacts self-efficacy among first-year teachers in diverse contexts. Garcia Elementary, serving a predominantly bilingual student body, has long faced challenges with first-year teacher retention, particularly among educators working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Douglass Middle School, located in a historically underserved community, has reported high turnover among early-career teachers, often citing lack of instructional support as a major factor. Okafor High School, one of the largest secondary schools in the district, has struggled with inconsistent mentoring programs for new teachers, leading to varied levels of professional growth and self-efficacy. The district's existing mentorship structures have been critiqued for their lack of sustained engagement, with exit interviews revealing that many first-year teachers felt unsupported despite being assigned mentors. By focusing on these three schools, this study explored how a structured peer mentoring model might serve as an intervention to strengthen teacher self-efficacy and retention in high-need environments...

Participants and Recruitment

- Selection criteria for participants
- Recruitment process and ethical considerations

This study included 20 first-year teachers and their assigned peer mentors from Garcia Elementary, Douglass Middle School, and Okafor High School. First-year teachers were recruited through a district-wide referral process in collaboration with school principals and induction program coordinators. Participation was voluntary, ensuring a diverse representation across grade levels and subject areas. Peer mentors were selected based on a structured set of criteria to ensure consistency in mentorship quality. Mentors were required to have: a minimum of five years of teaching experience; demonstrated instructional leadership, such as prior engagement in professional learning communities or mentoring

programs; a willingness to participate in structured peer mentoring focused on self-efficacy development; and mentor-mentee pairings prioritized same-subject or grade-level matches to maximize relevance and allow for collaborative problem-solving around real-time instructional challenges. To ensure ethical compliance, all participants received an informed consent form (Appendix D) detailing the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and data protection measures. Participants were explicitly informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities. Additionally, district administrators were not involved in mentor-mentee matching or data analysis to mitigate concerns about performance-based evaluations influencing participation...

Data Sources

- Overview of qualitative and quantitative data sources
- Justification for selecting these sources

This study employed a mixed-methods design using three primary data sources to assess the impact of structured peer mentoring on first-year teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. The first data source was pre- and post-program surveys adapted from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, which measured self-efficacy levels at the beginning and end of the academic year. These surveys used a Likert-scale rating system (1-5) to assess perceived confidence in instruction, classroom management, and student engagement. The results provided quantitative data on changes in self-efficacy over time, analyzed using paired t-tests to determine statistically significant improvements. The second data source was semi-structured interviews conducted with both first-year teachers and mentors at three points during the study: fall, mid-year, and spring. The fall interviews focused on baseline reflections regarding initial challenges, the mid-year interviews served as a check-in to assess mentor-mentee relationship development and evolving self-efficacy, and the final interviews in the spring provided insights into the perceived benefits and limitations of the mentoring experience. These interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of how first-year teachers experienced the mentoring process, what aspects were most influential, and how they navigated challenges throughout the academic year. The third data source was classroom observations, conducted monthly from September to April, to document how first-year teachers implemented instructional strategies discussed with their mentors. These observations focused on classroom management techniques, student engagement strategies, and overall instructional confidence, providing a real-time view of teacher development. Observational field notes were taken to track changes in practice over time, and trends in instructional decision-making were analyzed in relation to mentorship interactions. The combination of surveys, interviews, and observations ensured a multi-dimensional analysis,

capturing both measurable changes in self-efficacy and the lived experiences of participants in the peer mentoring program. The triangulation of these data sources strengthened the validity of findings, providing actionable insights for Lincoln School District's efforts to institutionalize structured peer mentoring as a core component of teacher induction...

Data Collection Procedures

- Step-by-step process of data collection

Data collection occurred over the course of one full academic year (August-May) and included pre- and post-program self-efficacy surveys (n=20), semi-structured interviews (n=15) at three intervals (fall, mid-year, and spring), and monthly classroom observations (n=30) across all participants. The study followed a three-phase data collection process to systematically track changes in first-year teacher self-efficacy. In Phase 1 (August-September), first-year teachers (n=20) completed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) survey (See Appendix A) before beginning the structured peer mentoring program. Baseline interviews (n=5 mentors, n=5 mentees) were conducted (See Appendix B) to assess initial expectations, concerns, and prior mentorship experiences. These interviews provided insight into how mentees perceived their preparedness for the school year and how mentors anticipated supporting them. In Phase 2 (September-April), classroom observations (n=30) were conducted monthly for each first-year teacher (See Appendix C for the observation guide). These observations documented instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management techniques to assess real-time shifts in teacher confidence and effectiveness. Mid-year semi-structured interviews (n=5 mentors, n=5 mentees) were conducted to track mentoring progress and self-efficacy changes. Mentor logs (See Appendix E) documented the frequency and nature of mentor-mentee interactions, capturing structured mentoring meetings, informal check-ins, and instructional discussions. In Phase 3 (May), first-year teachers completed the post-program self-efficacy survey (n=20) to assess confidence growth. Final semi-structured interviews (n=5 mentors, n=5 mentees) provided reflections on mentorship benefits and challenges. These final interviews captured participant perspectives on the most impactful aspects of structured peer mentoring and identified areas for program improvement. The systematic integration of surveys, interviews, and observations ensured that findings captured both measurable changes in self-efficacy and the lived experiences of participants....

Data Analysis Procedures

- Methods for analyzing qualitative and quantitative data

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were employed to examine the impact of structured peer mentoring on first-year teachers' self-efficacy, ensuring a rigorous,

multi-dimensional interpretation of the data. Quantitative data from pre- and post-program self-efficacy surveys (n=20) were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine whether statistically significant gains occurred in self-efficacy across three key areas: classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement. The statistical analysis assessed whether participation in structured peer mentoring resulted in measurable improvements in teacher confidence over time. For example, one first-year teacher initially rated her ability to manage student behavior at 2.8 on a 5-point scale but, by the end of the mentoring program, rated herself at 4.2 after implementing mentor-recommended classroom strategies. These numerical changes provided empirical evidence of the effectiveness of structured peer mentoring in enhancing teachers' instructional confidence. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews (n=15) and classroom observations (n=30) were transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis approach. This process involved three stages of coding to systematically identify patterns and themes related to teachers' mentoring experiences. In the first stage, open coding, broad themes such as mentor support, instructional confidence, and emotional reassurance were identified across interview transcripts and field notes. For example, multiple mentees expressed that their mentors provided not only instructional guidance but also critical emotional support, reassuring them after difficult teaching days. The second stage, axial coding, examined the relationships between these emerging themes. This phase helped to identify how specific mentoring practices—such as instructional modeling, immediate feedback, and problem-solving discussions—contributed to self-efficacy growth. One mentor described how co-teaching a lesson with a mentee helped the new teacher gain confidence in adjusting lesson pacing, which was later observed as the mentee independently modified their teaching approach in a follow-up classroom visit. The final stage, selective coding, refined key insights to align with the study's research questions. The data revealed that mentees who engaged in frequent reflective conversations with their mentors reported greater confidence than those who only had sporadic mentor interactions. For example, one mentee described how she initially struggled with classroom discipline until her mentor modeled proactive behavior management strategies. This was later observed during a classroom visit, reinforcing the impact of instructional modeling on teacher confidence. To enhance reliability, findings were triangulated by comparing survey trends with interview narratives and classroom observations, ensuring a holistic interpretation of structured peer mentoring's effects...

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

- Techniques used to mitigate bias and ensure research integrity

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed multiple validation strategies. Triangulation was used by cross-referencing survey results, interview data, and classroom observations to

confirm findings. Member-checking allowed participants to review and validate their interview transcripts, ensuring that their experiences were accurately represented. Peer debriefing involved colleagues and faculty mentors reviewing coding structures and interpretations to challenge potential researcher bias. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document all research decisions, coding structures, and analytic choices, enhancing transparency and reliability. Ethical considerations included obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to data collection, securing informed consent from all participants, and ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and de-identified data. Participants were also given the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. These measures helped safeguard research integrity while prioritizing the well-being and privacy of participants...

Chapter Summary and Transition to Chapter 4: Findings and Implications

- Recap of key insights from the investigative approach
- Transition to Chapter 4

This chapter detailed the investigative approach used to examine the impact of structured peer mentoring on first-year teachers' self-efficacy. It provided a comprehensive overview of the study context, participant recruitment, data sources, collection procedures, and analysis methods. The researcher's positionality was acknowledged, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and ethical rigor were described. Chapter 4 will present the findings and implications, synthesizing quantitative and qualitative results to highlight patterns, participant insights, and practical recommendations for strengthening peer mentoring programs in teacher induction...

Chapter 4: Findings and Implications

Introduction

- Overview of the chapter's purpose
- Summary of how findings will be presented

This chapter presents the findings from the study, analyzing how participation in a structured peer mentoring program influenced first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement within Lincoln School District. As a Dissertation in Practice, this research was designed to directly inform and improve teacher induction programs in the district, ensuring that mentoring structures are responsive to the actual needs of novice teachers. Findings are organized by research question, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of how structured peer mentoring impacted teacher confidence, instructional growth, and professional identity. The chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions, followed by a presentation of the findings drawn from surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The discussion then situates these findings within the broader research landscape while offering specific, actionable recommendations tailored to Lincoln School District's leadership and stakeholders. Additionally, this chapter provides a dissemination plan outlining how study results will be shared with district administrators and school leaders to drive meaningful improvements. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the scholar-practitioner's role in bridging research and practice, reinforcing the study's commitment to enhancing educational outcomes through applied, context-driven research...

Restatement of the Research Questions

- Reiteration of research purpose
- Alignment of research questions with findings presentation

The purpose of this study was to examine how participation in a structured peer mentoring program influenced first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement.

The central research question guiding this study was:

How does participation in a structured peer mentoring program impact first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs over the course of an academic year?

Sub-questions included:

1. *How do first-year teachers describe their experiences with peer mentoring?*
2. *What aspects of peer mentoring contribute most to changes in self-efficacy beliefs?*
3. *How do peer mentors perceive their role in supporting new teachers?*

By addressing these questions, this chapter highlights how structured peer mentoring influences teacher confidence and professional growth, providing empirical evidence to inform future mentoring initiatives...

Findings Organized by Research Question

- Presentation of quantitative and qualitative findings
- Integration of survey data, interview responses, and classroom observations

Research Question 1: How does participation in a structured peer mentoring program impact first-year teachers' self-efficacy beliefs over the course of an academic year?

Survey data revealed a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy scores among first-year teachers, particularly in classroom management and student engagement. The mean self-efficacy score improved from 3.2 to 4.5 on a 5-point scale, with 85% of participants reporting that mentorship helped them feel more confident in their instructional abilities. Interviews reinforced these findings, with many teachers describing structured peer mentoring as the most valuable component of their induction year. Observational data further supported this trend—teachers who had more frequent mentor interactions demonstrated stronger classroom presence, engaged students more effectively, and exhibited greater adaptability in lesson execution. One first-year teacher, Aisha, shared, “At the start of the year, I felt like I was barely keeping my head above water. My mentor helped me see small wins and guided me through tough moments. Now, I walk into my classroom knowing I have the skills to manage challenges.” These reflections highlight the transformational role structured mentorship can play in a teacher’s sense of agency and instructional decision-making...

Research Question 2: How do first-year teachers describe their experiences with peer mentoring?

Mentees consistently described structured peer mentoring as a critical support system, providing both practical instructional guidance and emotional reassurance. Eighty-five percent (85%) of first-year teachers reported that their mentor was their primary source of professional support, with 70% indicating that peer mentoring contributed more to their instructional growth than formal professional development sessions. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of mentees highlighted the importance of having a mentor who was not in an evaluative role, as this fostered a judgment-free environment where they felt comfortable asking questions and admitting challenges. One mentee, DeAndre, explained, “My mentor was

the only person I felt I could be completely honest with. I could say, 'I have no idea how to handle this student's behavior,' and she'd give me strategies without making me feel incompetent." First-year teachers also found informal "check-ins" (e.g., quick conversations before class, texts after a tough lesson, or debriefs over lunch) to be just as impactful as structured mentoring meetings, with 78% of mentees noting that these impromptu discussions helped them more than formalized meetings because they were directly tied to the day's challenges. However, 42% of mentees reported inconsistencies in mentor availability, particularly during high-stakes periods like grading deadlines or standardized testing preparation. These findings highlight the need for formalized scheduling within the school day, ensuring that mentoring time is protected rather than left to chance...

Research Question 3: What aspects of peer mentoring contribute most to changes in self-efficacy beliefs?

Three key aspects of peer mentoring emerged as the most influential in enhancing first-year teachers' self-efficacy: ongoing collaborative reflection, classroom modeling and feedback, and social-emotional support. Eighty-two percent (82%) of mentees who engaged in regular reflective conversations with their mentors reported feeling more confident in their instructional decision-making compared to those who only met sporadically. Classroom modeling and targeted feedback also played a significant role, with 75% of mentees stating that observing their mentor teach was one of the most impactful components of the program. Teachers who had opportunities to co-teach or receive immediate feedback after trying new strategies saw the greatest improvements in their classroom management and instructional delivery. Finally, social-emotional support emerged as a critical factor, with 88% of mentees reporting that their mentor helped them manage stress, navigate imposter syndrome, and persist through challenging moments. These findings suggest that self-efficacy growth is maximized when mentoring is consistent, hands-on, and emotionally supportive, reinforcing the need for structured reflection time, observation opportunities, and mentor training that includes strategies for emotional coaching...

Research Question 4: How do peer mentors perceive their role in supporting new teachers?

Mentors overwhelmingly described their role as a blend of instructional coach, thought partner, and emotional support system, with many emphasizing the reciprocal nature of the experience. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of mentors stated that mentoring helped them refine their own teaching practices, as discussing strategies with their mentees prompted them to reflect on their own instructional choices. However, 48% of mentors expressed concern over balancing mentorship with their own teaching workload, citing time constraints as the biggest barrier to effective mentoring. Some mentors found themselves juggling competing

priorities and wished for dedicated time within the school day for mentoring responsibilities. These findings underscore the importance of institutional support, suggesting that schools should formally integrate mentoring responsibilities into the workday to ensure that both mentors and mentees can fully engage in the process without additional strain...

Discussion and Implications

- Connection of findings to information presented in Chapter 2
- Interpretation of results and their significance

The findings of this study reinforce the practical application of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) and social learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) in the context of teacher induction, demonstrating that structured peer mentoring is an effective means of improving early-career teacher confidence and retention within Lincoln School District. First-year teachers who engaged in mentoring reported increased self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement—key areas identified in Chapter 2 as predictors of teacher persistence (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The study also supports research on collaborative learning, as mentors benefited from the exchange of ideas and reflective dialogue, consistent with the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins et al., 1991). However, the study also revealed barriers such as inconsistent mentor-mentee interactions and time constraints, aligning with prior research that highlights the logistical challenges of sustaining effective mentorship programs (Rockoff, 2008). These findings suggest that while mentorship is a powerful tool for professional growth, its success depends on structural integration within the district’s professional development framework. To maximize impact, Lincoln School District must embed mentoring into the school day, provide structured mentor training, and extend peer support beyond the first year, ensuring that mentorship is not just an informal practice but a core element of teacher development and retention efforts...

Actionable Recommendations

- Practical steps for enhancing mentorship in Lincoln School District

To ensure the long-term success of peer mentoring in Lincoln School District, strategic enhancements must be made based on the study’s findings. A key challenge identified was the lack of designated time for mentoring, which led to inconsistent meetings and limited collaboration. To address this, the district should embed mentoring sessions into the school schedule by integrating them into professional development days, common planning periods, or structured reflection time. This shift will ensure that mentoring is a consistent, institutionalized support rather than an optional add-on. Standardizing mentor selection and training is also essential for ensuring high-quality mentorship experiences. While mentors

were enthusiastic about their role, many lacked formal training, leading to inconsistent support across schools. The district should develop a structured mentor training program focused on instructional coaching, reflective dialogue, and social-emotional support. This training should be embedded within district-wide professional learning initiatives and supplemented with professional learning communities where mentors can discuss challenges, share strategies, and receive ongoing support. Another critical recommendation is extending mentorship beyond the first year. Many teachers indicated that continued support would help sustain self-efficacy and professional growth. A tiered mentoring model could provide intensive support for first-year teachers while transitioning second-year teachers to a peer-coaching model that balances autonomy with ongoing guidance. Expanding structured mentorship opportunities ensures that new educators receive long-term, scaffolded support rather than a short-term intervention. Finally, the district should establish clear evaluation metrics to assess the program's effectiveness. Tracking teacher retention rates, analyzing self-efficacy trends, and collecting ongoing feedback from both mentors and mentees will help refine program implementation. Creating a formalized feedback loop will ensure that the mentorship program remains dynamic, responsive, and aligned with the evolving needs of new teachers. By implementing these recommendations, Lincoln School District can elevate its mentoring program into a sustainable, high-impact initiative that enhances teacher retention, instructional quality, and professional resilience...

Dissemination Plan

- Strategies for sharing findings with key stakeholders

To ensure that the findings of this study inform district-wide improvements, results will be shared with Lincoln School District leadership, school administrators, and teacher induction coordinators through a district-wide professional learning session. This session will present key takeaways from the study, emphasizing the impact of structured peer mentoring on first-year teacher self-efficacy and outlining the practical steps needed for program enhancement. The session will also include a discussion component, allowing stakeholders to engage with the findings and collaboratively develop strategies for implementing the study's recommendations. Additionally, a comprehensive report summarizing the study's findings and recommendations will be provided to district decision-makers. This report will outline specific policy adjustments that can institutionalize mentorship as a core component of teacher induction, ensuring that all new teachers receive structured and sustained support. A targeted executive summary will also be distributed to school principals, teacher mentors, and induction program coordinators to facilitate immediate application of best practices. To engage educators directly, study findings will be shared at faculty meetings within participating schools. These presentations will focus on mentor and mentee experiences,

illustrating how mentorship shaped teacher confidence and professional growth. Teachers will be encouraged to provide feedback on how the mentoring program can be further refined to meet their needs. A digital repository with study insights, mentorship strategies, and implementation tools will also be created to provide ongoing access to relevant resources for both new teachers and mentors. Beyond Lincoln School District, findings will be shared with professional organizations and at education conferences focused on teacher development and retention. A manuscript based on this study will be prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed journal in teacher education or professional development, ensuring that the study contributes to the broader discourse on effective mentorship models. Through these dissemination efforts, the study's findings will not only inform local district practices but also contribute to a wider understanding of how structured peer mentoring can enhance teacher self-efficacy and retention on a national scale...

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

- Acknowledgment of study constraints
- Areas for future inquiry

This study provides critical insights into the role of structured peer mentoring in strengthening first-year teachers' self-efficacy within Lincoln School District. However, its scope was limited to a single academic year, making it difficult to assess the long-term sustainability of self-efficacy gains or their effect on teacher retention. Future program evaluation should track participants over multiple years to determine whether mentoring support leads to sustained professional growth and retention beyond year one. Additionally, while this study focused on mentor-mentee interactions, broader institutional factors—such as administrative support, leadership involvement, and school culture—were not fully examined. Future local studies should assess how principals, instructional coaches, and district policies influence mentoring effectiveness to ensure alignment between mentorship structures and larger organizational priorities. Further refinement of mentor selection, training, and workload balance is necessary to strengthen program impact. Many mentors reported struggling to balance their mentoring responsibilities with their own teaching loads. Investigating ways to integrate mentoring into structured professional learning time or provide incentives for mentor participation could enhance program sustainability. Finally, future iterations of the program should explore technology-enhanced mentorship models, including virtual check-ins, digital mentor logs, and hybrid mentoring approaches, to increase accessibility and flexibility. Expanding mentorship opportunities beyond face-to-face meetings may offer scalable, time-efficient solutions to better support first-year teachers. These ongoing improvements will ensure that Lincoln School District's peer mentoring program remains a sustainable, high-impact component of teacher induction and professional development...

Scholar-Practitioner's Reflection

- Personal takeaways from conducting the study

Conducting this study reinforced the power of applied research in driving meaningful improvements in educational practice. As a scholar-practitioner, I approached this research with both academic curiosity and a deep commitment to addressing real-world challenges in teacher induction. The voices of first-year teachers and mentors provided compelling evidence that mentorship, when structured and prioritized, can significantly impact teacher confidence and professional growth. This study reaffirmed that early-career teachers thrive when they have access to consistent, collaborative support, yet it also highlighted the systemic barriers that can limit mentorship effectiveness. One of the most valuable takeaways from this research was the confirmation that mentorship is not a one-size-fits-all model. Teachers reported that informal, day-to-day check-ins were just as impactful as formal mentorship meetings, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and relationship-building in mentoring structures. This insight reinforces the need for districts to provide both structured mentorship time and opportunities for organic, ongoing peer interactions. The study also deepened my understanding of the challenges mentors face. While mentors were eager to support their mentees, they struggled with balancing mentorship responsibilities alongside their own teaching workloads. This realization strengthened my belief that effective mentorship programs require institutional commitment, including protected mentoring time and professional learning opportunities for mentors themselves. Without these structural supports, even the most well-intentioned mentorship efforts may fall short. Moving forward, I am committed to continuing this work by advocating for mentorship as a foundational element of teacher development. This study has strengthened my belief that educational research must bridge theory and practice, translating findings into actionable strategies that directly benefit schools, teachers, and ultimately, students. As I share these findings with Lincoln School District and the broader education community, my hope is that they contribute to a larger movement toward more intentional, research-informed mentorship practices that support and retain high-quality educators...

Conclusion

- Summary of key takeaways

This study demonstrated that structured peer mentoring significantly enhances first-year teachers' self-efficacy by providing instructional guidance, collaborative reflection, and emotional support. The findings emphasize that mentorship is most effective when it is integrated into the professional development framework, supported by structured mentor

training, and extended beyond the first year. The study also revealed that inconsistent mentor availability and time constraints were key barriers, underscoring the importance of institutional support to ensure that mentoring remains a priority within the school environment. By embedding mentorship into school schedules, formalizing mentor training, and expanding mentorship beyond year one, Lincoln School District can ensure that early-career teachers receive the sustained, high-quality support necessary for long-term professional success. The findings contribute to the broader conversation on teacher retention and professional development, reinforcing the need for schools to move beyond traditional, informal mentorship models toward structured, research-driven peer mentoring programs. Future research should explore how mentorship programs impact long-term teacher retention beyond the first year, as well as how mentorship can be adapted to support teachers in different subject areas and school contexts. Additional studies examining the role of school leadership in facilitating effective mentorship and the impact of mentor-mentee pairing structures would further deepen the understanding of how peer mentoring can be optimized for maximum effectiveness. As schools continue to grapple with teacher attrition and professional development challenges, the lessons from this study offer practical, research-informed solutions that can strengthen mentorship programs and support the next generation of educators. By prioritizing mentorship as a fundamental component of teacher induction, Lincoln School District has the opportunity to build a sustainable culture of professional learning and collaboration that benefits both teachers and students in the years to come...

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Appendices

The appendices include all supporting materials used in data collection, recruitment, and ethical approval to ensure transparency and replicability. Each appendix is labeled (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B) and should be cited in the text when referenced (e.g., “See Appendix A for the full survey instrument”). In the context of this study:

Appendix A would contain the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) surveys used to measure changes in first-year teachers’ self-efficacy before and after the peer mentoring program. The full instrument, adapted from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), includes items assessing classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and student engagement.

Appendix B would present the semi-structured interview protocols for first-year teachers and peer mentors. These include baseline, mid-year, and final interview questions, along with follow-up probes used to deepen responses. When referencing interview questions in Chapter 3, they should be cited as “See Appendix B for the complete interview protocol.”

Appendix C would provide the classroom observation guide and field note template, detailing how instructional strategies and teacher confidence were documented. Observational criteria cited in Chapter 3 should reference “Appendix C for observation guidelines.”

Appendix D would include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter and informed consent form used to ensure ethical compliance. Any discussion of ethical procedures in the study should direct readers to “Appendix D for IRB approval and consent documents.”

Appendix E would contain participant recruitment emails and follow-up communication templates, including initial outreach messages, reminder emails, and scheduling confirmations. Recruitment procedures in Chapter 3 should reference “Appendix E for recruitment materials.”

Additional materials, such as mentor log templates and training guides, are included as needed to provide further context for the study’s implementation.