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Wendy Gardiner Research on Urban Teacher Induction

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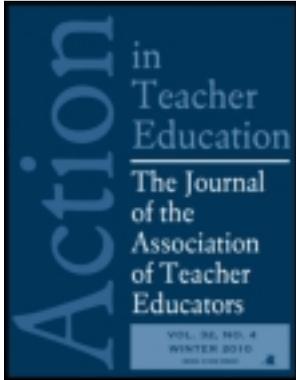
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New Urban Teachers Experience Induction Coaching: "Moving Vision Toward Reality"

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New Urban Teachers Experience Induction Coaching: “Moving Vision Toward Reality”

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Educational policy is increasingly recognizing the role mentored induction support plays in new teachers’ professional learning. This qualitative study explored eight new urban teachers’ experiences with and perceptions of mentored induction, referred to in this study as “coaching.” As an alternative to the predominant emotional or socialization constructs of induction support, this study investigates coaching from an “educative” stance that is instructionally oriented, collaborative, situated, and frequently enacted. Results indicate that interactions with coaches facilitated new teachers’ transition into urban classrooms; enhanced their ability to provide the type of student-centered instruction they envisioned, but struggled to achieve; and that coaching is a relationship that requires time, trust, and commitment. Insights and recommendations are provided to guide the development or strengthening of induction programs though a collaborative approach aimed towards instructional improvement and professional learning.

New teachers face a multitude of challenges. They experience high levels of stress due to the uncertain nature of classroom life; have a limited repertoire of strategies, routines, and practices; and often lack the contextual and conceptual knowledge needed to teach effectively (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Wang & Odell, 2002). These challenges tend to discourage new teachers from attempting or implementing innovative practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Wang & Odell, 2002) and lead them to focus more on management rather than effectively teaching and supporting student learning (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004). To this end, educators and policy makers recognize the need to provide a continuum of support to facilitate the transition from preservice preparation to independent practice and in response recommend the increase and expansion of induction programs (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Norman & Feiman-Nesmer, 2005; Strong, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2002). Indeed, the reauthorization of Title II of the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants earmarked \$300 million annually over the next 3 years for teacher preparation programs, such as Urban Teacher Residencies (UTRs), that not only prepare new teachers but also provide induction support when those candidates become teachers of record (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2009).

Currently, mentoring is the predominant form of induction support (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Wang & Odell, 2002). Research documents that strong mentored induction programs help new teachers provide relevant, rigorous, and robust instruction

(Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Wang & Odell, 2002; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Problematically, research also indicates that most mentoring programs do not affect teacher learning in substantive ways (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Wang & Odell, 2002; Wang et al., 2009). As educators and policy makers continue to advocate for further expansion of induction programs in which mentor teachers are the primary policy actor, educational research states that there is a marked need to understand what types of mentored support promotes new teachers' learning and development (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2002; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to expand the scholarship on mentored induction programs by seeking to understand how eight new urban teachers who graduated from a UTR perceived and experienced mentored induction support (referred to in this study as induction coaching) and to identify characteristics of mentored induction that fostered (or impeded) their professional learning and development. As educators and policy makers continue to look to mentored induction to improve teaching and learning, insights derived from the experiences of those being coached can inform the way mentored induction translates from policy to practice. Such insights can be applied in the mentoring and induction programs in UTRs, as well as in colleges and universities looking to not only bridge preparation and induction support, but also as a lens to examine current forms of support provided by supervisors.

Background

The eightfirst-year teachers who participated in this study were graduates of a Chicago based UTR—a one-year graduate level, grant-supported teacher education/induction program that was a collaboration between Chicago Public Schools (CPS), National-Louis University, and the Academy of Urban School Leadership. In the UTR framework (see Gardiner & Kamm, 2010), preservice teachers, called “residents,” take graduate-level coursework leading to certification and have a yearlong placement with a mentor teacher a CPS “training academies.” In the training academies, mentors facilitate the connection between theory and practice, demonstrate and support student-centered learning, and provide ongoing coaching and feedback to residents. Upon graduation, the UTR provides induction support by working with CPS to match graduates (in clusters) with reform-oriented principals and provide 2 years of mentored induction support by coaches. Coaches are former urban teachers with at least 5 years of teaching experience and the coaching model is a collaborative, inquiry-based model aimed toward instructional improvement and professional growth.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Strong mentoring programs conceptualize mentoring as professional learning and view mentoring as a collaborative process intended to promote dispositions of analysis, inquiry, and ongoing professional learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2001; Schwille, 2008; Wang & Odell, 2002). When mentored induction occurs within such a framework, new teachers' professional practice and ability to effectively meet their learners' needs is enhanced (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Wang & Odell, 2002; Wang et al., 2009). However, most mentoring programs define new teacher needs in terms of retention and

socialization and fail to improve teaching and learning (Wang & Odell, 2002). What follows is a review of the dominant conceptualizations of mentoring and an instructionally oriented alternative.

Wang and Odell's (2002) meta-analysis of mentoring research indicates that most mentoring programs and practices are conceived of and executed in humanistic and/or technical terms, rather than from a perspective of directly supporting professional learning. From a humanistic orientation, the role of mentoring is to provide temporary emotional support to increase retention by helping new teachers deal with the "reality shock" and emotional stress of teaching. Mentors in this orientation have strong interpersonal skills such as being good listeners, encouraging, and openminded (Wang & Odell, 2002). Implicit in this expectation is that once new teachers feel comfortable and secure, professional learning will follow. Indeed, most mentors and new teachers define mentoring in affective rather than pedagogic terms (Wang & Odell, 2002). A limitation of a humanistic orientation is that it provides short-term emotional intervention without enhancing teachers' skills to address the problems causing duress.

Technical orientations suggest that the role of mentor is to be a "local guide" who helps new teachers adapt to their new contexts. In a technical orientation, mentors provide advice, offer suggestions or solutions to problems, explain school policies and procedures, and help new teachers complete administrative task. These functions are intended to facilitate the transition from being a university student to being the teacher of record and a member of the school community. Certainly, some degree of context based assistance is valuable. Yet a technical orientation predicated on socialization has limitations. First, if the mentors' practices are not congruent with reform oriented teaching, the advice and guidance they provide can reify the status quo of teacher-centered instruction even if new teachers' preparation was studentcentered in nature (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). Next, when mentoring is predicated on advice and guidance, a hierarchy is often created that inhibits inquiry and exploration into issues of teaching and learning, and situates new teachers' as recipients of wisdom rather than constructors (or coconstructors) of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000).

As a more comprehensive alternative, Feiman-Nemser (1998) developed and refers to the term "educative mentoring" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005) to advocate for a situated, collaborative approach intended to improve new teachers' professional practice. To this end, educative mentoring is predicated on social views of learning (John-Steiner, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978) that situate learning in context, regard the learner as an active constructor of knowledge, and conceive of learning in terms of assisted performance. From this framework, mentoring is (1) situated in the new teachers' classrooms where mentors have ample time to observe practice to have an in-depth contextual understanding of the classroom dynamics and the new teachers' practice; (2) a scaffolded experience in which new and more experienced teachers work together on the problems of practice for the purpose of improving instruction and increasing professional learning; and (3) conceived as part of a continuum of professional development that seeks to foster habits of mind and dispositions to promote ongoing learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Schwille, 2008).

In an educative framework, mentors go beyond providing emotional support, tips, and advice to help new teachers improve their practice by engaging in collaborative analysis into classroom events, see the classroom in increasingly complex ways, and develop dispositions of reflective

inquiry. To provide this level of support, mentors need to be carefully selected, prepared, and receive ongoing professional development that includes helping new teachers connect theory and practice; engage in the collaborative construction of knowledge, problem solve, and pose alternative interpretations to classroom events; and identify and explore challenges associated with teaching and learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Wang & Odell, 2002; Schwille, 2008). Furthermore, new teacher learning is enhanced when mentors and novices teach in similar grades or content areas (Youngs, 2007) and have adequate release time to develop an in-depth contextual understanding of new teachers' needs and the classroom environment, and have sufficient time to engage in serious, substantive and sustained work (Schwille, 2008; Strong, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2002; Youngs, 2007).

Research on strong, educative mentoring programs indicates that new teacher learning is increased and professional practice is enhanced (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 1998; 2001b; Wang et al., 2009). However, such programs tend to be the exception, rather than the rule (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). Most mentoring programs are narrowly conceived and are underfunded (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002). As a result, many mentors are not adequately prepared to support new teachers' professional learning, time allocated for joint work is insufficient and ad hoc, and mentored support is viewed as a temporary intervention to ease the transition into the teaching profession.

METHOD

Context

This study occurred at two high-poverty, low performing Pre-K through eighth-grade schools in a metropolitan Midwestern public school system. "Morris" and "Howard" (pseudonyms) were considered chronically underperforming defined by multiple years of low student achievement, high absentee levels, and large numbers of student suspensions. As part of district reform initiatives, Morris and Howard had recently been shut down and then reopened with new, reform oriented leadership. The newly hired principals interviewed teachers and replaced virtually all of the faculty while the student population remained the same. As part of the UTR collaboration, reform-oriented principals had opportunities to observe and interview residents in April as they neared program completion. Principals knew that residents would be provided with 2 years of site-based induction coaching. To facilitate coherence, principals were asked to include coaches in leadership meetings. Principals were informed of the coaching model and understood that coaches had a collaborative, not evaluative or hierarchical role.

At the time of this study, Morris and Howard were in their first year with new leadership and faculty. Of the 30 classroom teachers at Morris and Howard, one teacher had formerly worked at Howard, 15 were first-year teachers prepared in the UTR, and the rest came from other public schools. Morris had, in general, one class per grade level and approximately 300 students, 99% were African American and 98% were low income. Howard had two classes per grade level and approximately 550 students, 98% were African American and 100% were low income. There were five first-year teachers at Morris and 10 new teachers at Howard. Two teachers from Morris and six teachers from Howard volunteered to participate in this study.

Three induction coaches respectively served Grades K–2, 3–5, and 6–8 at Morris and Howard. Each coach was responsible for a grade-level cluster and worked approximately 2½ days per week at both schools. Additionally, each coach had previously taught in high-poverty, high-needs schools within the school district. Prior to their work with new teachers, coaches received professional development in a collaborative, inquiry-based coaching model and worked with teachers in clusters of schools. Coaches also received ongoing professional development during the school year. Coaches and new teachers met during summer faculty sessions prior to the start of the school year.

Participants

The participants in this study included eight first-year teachers out of a total of 10 new teachers at Howard and five new teachers at Morris. Selection was random from among those who volunteered to participate, but the sample represented teachers across a range of grade levels. To this end, there were three K–2 teachers who were supported by the primary coach (two at Howard, one at Morris), three Grades 3–5 teachers who were supported by the intermediate coach (two at Howard, one at Morris), and two Grades 6–8 grade teachers who were supported by the upper grade coach (both at Howard, there were no volunteers from Morris). Each new teacher was female and taught in Grades K–7. Ages ranged from 24 to 36. Each teacher self-identified as coming from middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds. Six teachers were African American and two were White. All names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection & Analysis

Data collection included interviews and observations and occurred during the 2008–2009 academic year. I conducted three individual, in-depth interviews (Seidman, 1998) with eight new teachers 3 times throughout the year (Fall 2008, Winter 2009, and Spring 2009) for a total of 24 interviews. Interviews were held in each teacher's respective classroom, typically before or after school and lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. A structured interview protocol was developed to understand how new teachers experienced induction coaching. Through the protocol I sought to understand coaching patterns and interactions; tensions and benefits derived from coaching relationship and interactions; ways in which coaching did/did not impact instruction and learning; how relationships with students and instructional practices unfolded throughout the year; formal and informal sources of support and professional learning; goals pertaining to students and instruction and where teaching and learning was situated vis-à-vis new teachers' goals; and prior instructional experiences with students. I also asked additional probing or clarifying questions to delve deeper into topics that emerged. After each interview, interview data were recorded and transcribed. Then, transcripts and interim analyses were returned to participants for their review and to inform subsequent interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I also conducted a total of 32 classroom observations. Observations were scheduled after each interview in the fall, winter, and spring to observe classroom instruction; to gain an understanding of the changing classroom context, instructionally and relationally; and to observe coaching sessions. Classroom observations generally lasted 45 to 60 minutes as well as time spent throughout the school and school grounds to gain a larger contextual understanding. Field notes were taken

during observations. Additional data sources included a review of coaching documents and syllabi from three graduate courses, informal interviews with administrators and coaches to clarify processes and procedures.

Data analysis was ongoing, inductive, and occurred through comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After each interview/observation cycle, interviews, observational, and document data were coded through open, then axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I followed a recursive pattern of making constant comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) across the growing data set to identify patterns of meaning, contrasting experiences, and develop concepts and tentative themes. Ongoing comparisons served to refine, revise, and synthesize conceptual codes into larger patterns of meaning from which themes were derived (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout this process, member checks were conducted to increase credibility (Glesne, 2005).

RESULTS

This section begins with an overview of the coaching process to describe the type and frequency of engagement between new teachers and their coaches. Then, interpretive themes are discussed that elaborate upon how coaches facilitated new teachers' transition into a challenging environment by providing directive yet individualized support; provided targeted resources to help new teachers' improve their practice and maintain their emotional stamina; helped new teachers achieve their instructional goals; and that coaching is a process that is predicated on time, trust, and commitment.

Coaching Overview

Throughout the year, coaches saw new teachers three to four times per week. Visits were a combination of scheduled and "pop-in" observations and once or twice a week coaches and new teachers had "standing appointments" for in-depth conversations. Scheduled and unscheduled observations typically lasted 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the lesson and focus. Coaches would typically sit unobtrusively and take notes on a predetermine topic based upon a prior discussion such as "look generally for management," "watch for student engagement," "watch this particular student," "tally the types of questions I'm asking—higher and lower levels," "help me make my math instruction stronger," "help me with my writer's workshop," or "what's wrong with my transitions." At times coaches would subtly redirect students or work with students who were having difficulties but mostly the focus was on teaching and learning. Typically, after unscheduled, "pop-in" visits new teachers and/or coaches would follow up with a phone call, e-mail, text, or an after-school conversation.

Each new teacher and coach also had a regularly scheduled weekly meeting time for in-depth conversations. Although, depending on need, throughout the year, some new teachers and coaches met more frequently. The typical pattern was coaches would recap what they saw without evaluation. Then, they would ask new teachers what they thought of the lesson and if there was anything they would change or retain. The coach might probe by asking, "Why did you teach it this way?" or "Is there anything you would want to reteach?" The discussion would typically begin with new teachers' reflection and analysis, with looking at data (if any were collected), with the coach

guiding or prompting for clarification or conceptualizing alternatives. Coaches and new teachers would start off in a reflective and analytical way and then shift to “brainstorming sessions” for how best to achieve a particular goal such as “managing tighter transitions,” “getting a particular student to be more engaged,” “implementing math centers,” “increasing my differentiation,” or “fine tuning my guided reading lessons.” After reflecting, problem solving, and discussing the observation, coaches would ask if there were any challenges new teachers needed help with or if there was anything else they could provide. During this time, coaches and new teachers might also coplan a future lesson and determine what additional resources might be helpful. In addition, coaches might model a lesson or practice, or schedule a time to model or coteach in classroom. At the end of the discussion, coaches and new teachers would set specific goals for upcoming observations, professional development, and, as needed, set additional meeting times to work on a specific goal or strategies or review resources. Importantly, communication between coaches and new teachers was frequent, and coaches were accessible and responsive. New teachers stated that they frequently texted, e-mailed, or called their coaches in the evenings and on weekends to ask questions, ask for resources, or to “bounce ideas around.”

Facilitating the Transition: “A Completely Different Context”

At the beginning of the year, new teachers explained they felt overwhelmed trying to simultaneously get to know students, learn new curriculum, meet a wide range of social and academic needs, and build a positive learning culture in schools that were in the process of cultural and curricular change. New teachers explained they were “overwhelmed,” “barely holding it together,” and not feeling confident in their ability to manage, let alone teach their students. Even with a yearlong placement in urban training academies with an experienced mentor, each new teacher stated they were “illequipped” and “unprepared” to respond effectively to the full range of challenges they faced in their new schools. Reflecting the sentiments of her colleagues, Monique explained that the urban training academies and their new urban schools were “just a completely different context. . .in regard to learning gaps and behavior needs,” and the ways students perceived the role and value of school in their lives. Although new teachers were experiencing a transition shock, coaches had prior teaching experiences in high-poverty, high-needs schools and were able to not only help new teachers make sense of their new context, but also help them become more effective in their new classrooms.

Document review and interviews indicate that during the first months of school, coaching centered on strengthening the classroom environment: building and refining routines and procedures, developing a knowledge of students (personalities and learning needs), and creating a safe and functional environment for learning. Coaches and new teachers met to discuss coaches’ observations; analyze what routines, instructional practices, and procedures were effective or needed to be refined (or replaced); and identify next steps such as having the coach model a transition or recreate routines. As experienced urban educators who had taught in similar grade levels, new teachers found that coaches had credibility. They felt that the insights, feedback, and suggestions offered by coaches most often brought about quick and immediate results—and when they did not, coaches were there to continue brainstorming and problems solving. In fact, new teachers believed that prior urban experiences were essential to coaches’ capacity to provide relevant recommendations, to help new teachers’ understand and more effectively respond to resistant learners, help new teachers understand why routines or strategies that were successful

at the training academy were not working effectively, and subsequently determine what modifications were likely to be beneficial. Despite a belief that “good teaching is good teaching,” they emphasized the importance of urban experience and contextual knowledge of students living in poverty. Echoing her colleagues, Heather stated, “If a coach has not worked in the city, it’s a big detriment.”

New teachers (and coaches) recalled that conversations during the first month of school were less centered on reflection (as they would later become), and more geared towards “how to” build a smooth running classroom. In this manner, coaches provided direct advice, feedback, and recommendations. New teachers explained that this type of interaction was “necessary,” “appreciated,” and made them “not feel alone” in a very challenging situation. Dominique, reflecting her colleagues’ statements, conveyed that a directive approach from her coach was welcomed. As she put it, “[My coach] has been in my shoes and her suggestions worked.”

Even though coaching was directive, it was not uniform, and suggestions were presented as options to consider, not mandates. As a result of the frequent contact, new teachers felt that coaches quickly came to know them, their goals and frustrations, their students, and their students’ needs. The specific routines, procedures, management, and instruction that new teachers and coaches were working on were reflective of the real and immediate needs of the classroom. For example, while Heather and Emma were working to establish their “teacher voice and presence,” Julie and Angela were working to create community building routines, while Jennifer was trying to improve her transitions and management systems. So, though in the beginning of the year coaching in each room centered around providing advice and feedback, and typically focused on classroom management, the feedback and advice was customized to the needs of the new teacher and her classroom.

Additionally, coaching suggestions and advice was presented as options that as Heather explained, “I could choose to implement or not.” So, though each new teacher repeatedly described the value of and need for the coach to provide direct suggestions, advice, and ideas, they maintained that coaching recommendations should be alternatives to consider and not mandates to follow. In this manner, coaches’ targeted and specific advice and recommendations helped new teachers cocreate, more quickly than they could have alone, a “well-oiled classroom” and a “safe environment” for learning.

“A Wealth of Resources”: Targeting Individual Needs

Throughout the year, new teachers consistently spoke of the “wealth of resources” coaches provided as one of the most valuable aspects of coaching. Specifically, the resources provided were not generic or one size fits all. Rather, resources were derived from observations and dialogue about real and immediate issues and geared toward meeting new teachers’ needs. To do this, coaches not only provided targeted professional resources, but also became an emotional resource when the challenge of teaching became too great.

New teachers indicated they were often emotionally tapped by the joint task of teaching and learning to teach in a high-needs, high-poverty environment. Moreover, they explained they did not have the range of resources necessary to meet their learners’ needs and their curricular goals, the time to find relevant resources, or the knowledge of what resources were available and credible. As Emma recalled, “It was crucial that she was able to pull together and synthesize resources, because I know I don’t have the time.” Along the same lines Angela stated, “An important role

of the coach is to have a plethora of resources, because as a first year teacher, I have no resources and don't always know what is or is not quality."

New teachers stated that the resources coaches provided were in direct response to their pressing needs: be it with classroom management, locating materials for students, instructional strategies, or grant applications to fund classroom libraries. For example, Dominique explained that literacy instruction was her weakness. In particular, she was struggling to implement Guided Reading and stated she did not have the knowledge base to teach nonreaders nor did she have books appropriate to the wide range of reading levels in her second-grade classroom. Her coach went out and found videos of Guided Reading lessons that they watched and discussed together. Then, together they determined a plan for implementation and scheduled follow-up sessions to analyze progress. Her coach also located an online site from which Dominique could review, select, and download books for her students to take home that were at their independent reading level as well as books for the classroom that were at students' instructional level.

Jamilah recalled being at the "end of her rope [with] a student who has anger management issues, he just can't control himself and I know he wants to." In response, her coach brought in "this big behavioral practices book, and we just sat there and looked through it together until we found one [a strategy] that we thought would work." After coming up with a plan, Jamilah had her coach "come in and observe that student" and discuss how the strategy was working, and determine if she should continue, revise, or come up with an alternate plan. A recurrent pattern in the interactions was that not only did coaches provide targeted resources. Coaches and new teachers established a pattern of joint thinking and continuity as they reviewed resources, identified what might be most useful, brainstormed implementation plans, and scheduled follow-up sessions to determine next steps.

Finally, when new teachers unpacked the concept of resource, they also described coaches as an emotional resource. Each new teacher was surprised by the amount of physical, intellectual, and emotional energy expended. Throughout the year, they explained that despite strong relationships with principals, they needed someone in a "nonevaluative role" with whom they could let their guard down, who could help them "not feel like such a horrible teacher" and help provide "the courage to keep teaching." Each new teacher talked about the ups and downs of teaching, the heavy emotional toll "trying to recreate school for their students" was taking. They talked about how important it was to "know someone is there for you when you are at the end of your rope." As Julie explained, "all day long, we are doing our best to meet our kids' needs. Whatever they need. It's good to have someone who gives back to us."

Thought Partner: "Mov[ing] Closer to My Vision"

From the beginning of the year new teachers described their vision of and prior experiences with student-centered instruction. They described their ideal classroom as one that was "democratic," "student-centered," where students "valued learning" and could work collaboratively and independently. Despite a yearlong internship in an urban school that exemplified such practices, bringing their vision to fruition in their current setting was very challenging. New teachers believed that their ongoing relationship with their coach helped them meet their goals of "rigor" and "student-centered instruction" more quickly than they could on their own. Coaches became "thought partners" with whom they could coanalyze their instructional practice and "unpack" their goals into sequential and manageable steps.

To begin, new teachers stated that they were limited by inexperience and their singular perspective. Coaches provided another “set of eyes” to help new teachers see their classroom, individual students, and the impact of their instruction in alternative ways. As Sophie stated, “I’m on the inside, she sees things that I can’t see.” Consistently, new teachers said they valued the ongoing, individualized time to talk about their instruction with someone who really knew their classroom and with whom they could engage in “productive conversations” about “what was happening, what was working, and what could be done differently.”

New teachers stated that observation based conversations with their coaches enabled them to understand their classroom, their instruction or students in new ways and then develop “next steps” for improving or refining their practice. In this manner, discussions represented a “reflection in action” (Schon, 1983) cycle in which problems were identified, strategies were determined for subsequent implementation, and time for subsequent observations, reflection, and analysis were set. For example, Heather was concerned about her instructional rigor and asked her coach to observe and collect data. The starting point was for her coach to chart the types of questions (higher or lower level) that Heather asked. Then, they met and analyzed the data. After reviewing the data Heather stated that too many of her questions were low level. She and her coach then discussed options for changing the situation and came up with a solution of scripting out questions in advance and having her coach continue to collect data on her questioning.

New teachers also stated that the time to process their teaching with a more experienced colleague was needed and necessary but may not have happened with the same depth and regularity if they were on their own. Jamilah observed, “When you’re by yourself you go ‘that bombed, I wonder why?’ Talking with Kelly helped me reflect and go step by step. See what happened, what I could do next time.” Others stated that the sheer “busyness and exhaustion” meant they would not find the time or have the stamina for independent in-depth analysis of their teaching, even though such analysis “is what keeps you motivated, keeps you improving.” Emma explained that despite a reflective nature, without regular coaching conversations that level of analysis “would get away from me and it would be not until summer that I would really stop and think.”

New teachers also consistently stated that working with their coach helped them move toward meeting their instructional goals by “break[ing] down ideals and goals into manageable chunks.” Julie explained how her coach helped construct “a roadmap for curriculum and instruction:

I told her my vision and what I was hoping for and do-do-do-do she mapped it all out. She just heard what I was saying and put it in a tangible way for me to see it. It just took a load off of me because I had it all in my mind, but for some reason I couldn’t connect it to something tangible or that would even make sense. She was able to take everything that I said, and not do it for me, but just put it in a way that was usable.

Angela recalled wanting to include literacy centers and independent reading, but like many of her colleagues wanting to implement more student-centered or rigorous instruction, she was concerned about students’ readiness. Angela explained, “You can’t have class discussion when people are saying ‘your opinion doesn’t count’ or calling each other ‘stupid’.” Coaches helped new teachers “move vision to reality” by discussing “the big picture” and then deconstructing the larger goal into what Jamilah described as “baby steps that are achievable.” For Angela that meant slowly building up the classroom community, then teaching students to work in pairs, then in small groups, and eventually getting students to engage in and lead book discussions. In this manner, each new teacher believed that working with their coach helped them, as Aiesha stated,

“accelerate [their] learning curve.” Monique reflected, “I knew what I wanted to achieve, what I wanted my classroom to look like and feel like . . . Coaching helped me move closer to my vision.”

Importantly, new teachers stated that coaching was predicated on their needs, their goals, and their vision. New teachers determined the focus of observations and ultimately decided which “next steps” they would take in their classroom. Consistently, new teachers reiterated throughout the year that coaching must be “collaborative” and not hierarchical, and that a “forced approach” would be met with resistance. As such, new teachers valued having a “thought partner” with whom they could work to improve their practice, but that the emphasis was on partner.

“A Partnership”: Time, Trust, and Commitment

New teachers indicated that as the year progressed their ongoing interactions with coaches formed a partnership that ultimately helped them become better teachers. However, that partnership took time to develop. New teachers explained that the relationship evolved as coaches demonstrated accessibility, responsiveness, and a commitment to their professional growth.

New teachers explained that it took time to build trusting relationships and for them to “buy into” the coaching process. Several teachers stated that they were initially “stressed” and “nervous” when their coach came in to observe. Dominique recalled, “It took time before I realized she was here to help me become a better teacher and not be afraid to ask for help.” Similarly, Monique explained:

At first, I didn’t ask a lot of questions. I also didn’t share my ideas or I wasn’t open to saying, ‘Hey, what do you think about this?’ I just kept zip . . . I eventually opened up . . . because she makes you feel comfortable, you don’t feel like you are under the microscope and being hammered. Eventually, I saw myself open up and it really just turned into a conversation. I started asking questions and that’s when I really started to feel momentum when I actually started to express myself and have her help me make it work. I can ask her anything now. Nothing is a dumb question.

What helped ease the stress was that new teachers felt that coaches were honest with their feedback but sensitive in how they delivered it and were nonjudgmental. New teachers wanted critical feedback and appreciated the insights coaches provided, but they also needed to know that coaches would “not be judgmental and that you should feel that you are all there together trying to figure this out together.” As Aiesha explained, “we want them to expect excellence from us, but we’re not model teachers.”

Relationships were also built through frequent contact, coaches’ accessibility and responsiveness to new teachers’ needs, and coaches’ and commitment to helping new teachers better their practice. New teachers noted that coaches were “in the building all the time” and “very accessible.” Each new teacher stated that they frequently communicated with their coach outside of school hours through text messages, instant messages, e-mails, and phone calls. New teachers consistently stated that coaches went “above and beyond” what they considered to be outside of the range of coach responsibilities just to make their “lives easier.” For example, if a special class was cancelled and new teachers would not have a break, coaches would check in on the new teacher see if they needed anything such as a short break or to have copies made. New teachers also recalled how coaches helped them rearrange their rooms, checked in after hours when they knew a new teacher had a particularly rough day, met with them after school hours at coffee shops

to plan lessons, or came into the school over the weekend to help them with instructional needs. As Angela recalled, “[My coach] was just so honest and eager and genuine that I just fell into her lap ‘help me please, I need you’.”

As such, new teachers came to know that coaches were dependable, encouraging, responsive, and committed to their growth. Interviews indicate that new teachers viewed coaches as a “trusted advocate.” They explained that coaches became someone with whom they could share concerns and who they trusted enough to reveal their “weaknesses and flaws.” It was important for new teachers to believe their coach was in their corner; and such commitment made investing in and investigating ways to improve learning and instruction a team effort. New teachers stated that no matter how badly something “fopped,” their coach was “in their corner,” and ready to help them to not only feel better, but also analyze, interpret, and grow professionally from that experience.

Monique explained, “Its genuine, it’s a partnership. She’s not evaluating but just wanting to help me improve, see things differently, and be creative in how I deliver things to the kids . . . she is helping me move closer to my vision.” In this manner, it appears that a foundation of trust and commitment not only strengthens the relationship, but also serves as a bedrock from which more authentic and productive learning can develop.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand how new teachers experienced and perceived mentored induction (referred to as coaching) and understand what aspects facilitated or impeded their learning. As Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) explained, “if we want to promote mentoring as a significant influence on new teacher learning, we need to know more about the kind of mentoring that makes a difference” (p.681). In contrast to research indicating that most mentoring relationships fail to go beyond humanistic or technical support and affect new teachers’ practice (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Wang & Odell, 2002), results from this study indicate that new teachers found coaching to be a source of support and a resource for learning. In fact, teachers attributed the ability to mediate meaning in a challenging new context, and construct the type of learning environment they envisioned, but struggled to enact to the ongoing work they did with their coaches. Each new teacher was returning the following year and stated that she looked forward to continued work with her coach. One hundred percent new teacher retention is significant and not typical of high-needs, high-poverty CPS. Indeed, CPS typically has a 40% attrition rate within the first 5 years and attrition rates increase significantly for each of the following factors: high poverty, low academic performance, and high number of students of color (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). What follows is an analysis on why coaching was valued and made an impact on new teachers’ practice followed by recommendations to help support an educative stance.

Reflecting strong mentoring programs (Howe, 2006; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Schuille, 2008; Strong, 2005), coaching was situated in the site of practice, occurred regularly, and was predicated on collaborative inquiry into teaching and learning. Importantly, coaching was tailored to new teachers’ individual needs and professional goals. Through frequent contact (in and outside of the classroom) coaches were able to develop an insider/outsider status. As “insiders” coaches were able to collaborate with new teachers to provide and/or model specific ideas and resources that met real and immediate needs. In addition, new teachers found that

coaches' insider/outsider status provided another (more experienced) perspective to "see" the classroom and interpret classroom events in more comprehensive and nuanced ways. The collaborative and inquiry based nature of coaching positioned coaches as a "thought partner." In this manner coaches helped new teachers analyze and reflect upon teaching and learning, provided the human and material resources required to scaffold new teachers' learning in customized ways reflective of new teachers' needs and goals, helped new teachers break down their larger "vision" into "manageable steps," and see that a professional practice is enhanced through collaboration.

As a "supportive, not evaluative role," new teachers believed that they could let their guard down, "admit weaknesses," and rely on coaches' for support and learning rather than hiding their concerns or weakness in fear of reprisal. In turn, coaches further solidified the relationship by demonstrating responsiveness and commitment to new teachers' professional growth (and emotional stamina). As a result of their ongoing collaboration, new teachers could try challenging practices and take instructional risks knowing they had an ongoing, responsive support system to help them analyze, interpret, and further improve their practice and spend less time on trial and error. As Monique reflected, "I could not have accomplished anywhere near this much with my students without [my coach]."

This study also demonstrates that though emotional support (humanistic mentoring) and direct advice (technical mentoring) is appreciated, new teachers valued instructionally oriented, collaborative (educative) coaching. So, though the end goal was professional learning, coaches' interactions with new teachers reflected an awareness of sociocultural understandings that there is an emotional component that must be met for learning to proceed effectively (John-Steiner, 2000) and that novices benefit direct advice and modeling reflective of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The following recommendations derived from the literature on educative coaching and the findings from this study should be replicated into other induction programs. Although coaching needs to be fundamentally about improving one's professional practice, judicious integration of humanistic and technical support is not contradictory to an educative stance. Also, coaching is best understood as a collaborative relationship that develops over time and is enhanced by trust and mutual commitment. Next, coaching should be a scaffolded experience that is "new teacher centered." For this to occur, sufficient time needs to be allotted to maintain regular observations to develop an in-depth knowledge of new teachers' needs and context. Adequate time is also essential for engaging in ongoing inquiry and analysis into teaching and learning with the aim of instructional improvement and professional growth. Additionally, effective mentored induction requires skilled mentors, with contextual and grade-level experience who have the commitment and ability to meet new teachers where they are instructionally and emotionally, provide a range of human and material resources, and jointly work to improve upon new teachers' practice. Finally, it is also important to note that principals were supportive of the coaching process and pleased with the outcomes. This type of coaching requires open access to classrooms and a significant time commitment. Without such support, it is likely that the effectiveness of coaching and the coaching relationship would be greatly reduced.

Research indicates that mentoring programs are typically inadequately conceptualized (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2002) and underfunded (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). As educational policy and educators increasingly rely on mentored induction to support new teachers' learning, this study speaks to the importance of defining mentored induction through an "educative stance" that is situated, ongoing, collaborative, and predicated on

improving professional practice. This study also highlights that humanistic and technical support can and should be recognized as part of an educative framework. As mentored induction continues to translate from policy to practice, it is important, particularly in this era of increased accountability, to conceptualize mentored induction as a customized process, and not become so focused on the end goal of increased performance that induction becomes a reductive, prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach.

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