Challenges in developing, enacting, and analyzing mentoring that focuses on teaching and learning: A university-school collaboration

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Teacher induction that involves both university and school has become a critical issue in teacher quality (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). A common stance among educators is that teacher preparation is only a starting point for preparing teachers to develop their practice. Consequently, the preparation of effective teachers needs to include both formal preservice teacher education and guided learning during the beginning years of teaching where the novice’s central task in the early years is learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Stanulis, Burrill, & Ames, in press). We believe that university and school partners should work together to support the continued learning and successful development of high quality teachers. As a university team of researchers spurred by the involvement of our university in the Teachers for a New Era Project (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001) we began to think about how induction might be operationalized within the public school setting as an extension of university preservice preparation.

Traditionally, formal university faculty support for beginning teachers ends at the culmination of the preservice experience. Few faculty members are available to help beginning teachers make sense of the transition from the university to school, leaving novices to sort out competing theories and differing points of view on their own (Worthy, 2005). Without support to connect back to their preservice experiences, beginning teachers’ induction experiences typically focus on learning to fit in to the norms of established school culture.
The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges in developing, enacting, and analyzing mentoring that focuses on teaching and learning practices that support beginning teachers. A starting marker for our work at our university was a year-long pilot study in one elementary school with five beginning teachers, five mentors (assigned by the principal prior to the opening of school) and the building principal. The goal of this work was to engage in joint task activities designed to connect central principles from preservice experiences with classroom practice through focused mentoring about teaching and learning.

**Beginning teacher learning**

Much of what beginning teachers learn during their first years depends on the opportunities in their school context to continue to learn (Grossman & Thompson, 2004). During the first year, such opportunities may be clouded by the many challenges beginning teachers face, including motivating students, dealing with a wide range of individual differences, confronting unfamiliar curricular content, knowing how to assess student work, negotiating relationships with students, parents, colleagues and administrators, and designing effective classroom management (Roehrig, Pressley & Talotta, 2002; Stanulis, Fallona & Pearson, 2002; Veenman, 1984). Though the study of beginning teacher challenges is well documented, few studies have examined the ways the context in which beginning teachers work can shape both the kinds of opportunities to learn and the ways in which teachers’ concerns and practices are defined (Grossman & Thompson, 2004).

**Mentoring as a practice for learning to teach**

The quality of interactions between beginning teachers and their colleagues can play a critical role in the success of novice teachers (Johnson & Kardos, 2004). Yet the assignment of mentors is typically based on convenience, volunteerism, and entitlement rather than on selection...
of mentors who are willing to help novices continue learning to teach. The haphazard way that mentor assignments are made (Worthy, 2005) sends the message that selection and preparation of mentors for this work is unnecessary. According to staff at the New Teacher Center (Gless, 2004), the recruitment and selection of teachers as mentors is perhaps the most important element in building a strong induction program.

In an effort to address new teacher attrition rates, school districts often rush to assign mentors to provide support for novices (Gold, 1996) without contemplating the complexities of and possibilities for mentoring. Without any preparation, the assigned mentors often become a “buddy,” someone who is available for advice and explaining school procedures, but visits to the new teacher’s classroom and conversations about teaching and learning are not expected (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

An alternate conception of mentor is one who can help novices transform knowledge from preservice teacher education into useful and practical information by integrating pedagogical knowledge with knowledge of students (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Shulman, 1987). From this frame, mentoring can support the development of novices as they learn to articulate their thinking and come to understand ways in which principled decision-making can enhance student achievement. Such “educative” mentoring places emphasis on engaging beginning teachers in joint inquiry with a mentor to help novices understand the importance of learning from practice while providing tools useful for studying teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). This guidance goes beyond sharing instructional tips to place the mentor in a teaching role to build on knowledge and experiences gained at the university. Through careful preparation and support, mentors can learn to have instructional conversations with novices that include understanding
subject matter (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999), planning instruction, student engagement and formative assessment (Wood, 1999).

School culture in learning to teach

The school culture is a critical element in building a successful mentoring component, for beginning teachers face the challenge of merging into the norms, values, and ideas of the school organization (Morgan, 1996). As novices learn to teach, their teacher identity forms through a negotiation of meanings among various people in their teaching context (Bullough & Stokes, 1994). Often the context in which a beginning teacher is developing becomes crowded with others’ knowledge about teaching, and the beginners’ voices are soft and hesitant (Stanulis, Campbell, & Hicks, 2002). In veteran oriented cultures, workplace norms are established by experienced teachers, novices are expected to fit in the defined culture, and new teachers’ unique needs and distinct voices are largely ignored (Johnson & Kardos, 2004). If professional development opportunities for novices as well as veterans are to help improve teacher knowledge and develop new instructional practices (Borko, 2004), the novices must be heard.

School cultures often have inclusive norms of collegiality. University representatives, as outsiders, face obstacles as they try to create new norms for working in a collegial way within a school setting. Developing such norms requires care in structuring multiple opportunities to learn for both experienced teachers and novices (Rosenholtz, 1985) and a willingness to learn and value multiple perspectives. Creating a collaborative relationship where schools and universities build consensus (Dallmer, 2004) rather than positioning for power takes time and thoughtful effort by everyone involved.

Methods

Research Design
The research focused on efforts to develop and systematically analyze challenges in shifting the focus of mentoring among a group of veteran teachers within one school context, a rural/suburban school in the Midwest without a formal induction program. A case study design provided an opportunity to develop an understanding of the mentoring component of induction in one school (Merriam, 1998). Five beginning teachers (four graduates of our preservice program), their mentors, and the principal were participants in the study. A university faculty member and a doctoral student designed and led efforts to provide professional development for the mentors in learning about and engaging in instructional mentoring practices. Our interactions with the beginning teachers were used to shape our conversations with the mentors about the novices’ challenges and needs in learning to teach.

Data Collection

Several types of data were collected during the academic year to provide intensive description of a within-site, single case (Creswell, 1998). The primary source of data were the monthly after school meetings with the mentors and beginning teachers across the school year. During these eight, two-hour meetings, mentors and beginning teachers first had separate conversations. The second half of each meeting focused on activities to promote joint mentor-beginning teacher conversations about teaching and learning. The principal attended several meetings. All of the meetings were audio-taped.

Interviews provided a second source of data. The principal participated in three 60 minute interviews in August, November and May. The interviews focused on the principal’s perspectives about mentoring for her beginning teachers. At the close of the study three of the five mentors volunteered to be interviewed about the experiences they encountered and the impact on their perspectives as mentors.
Finally, we collected artifacts of the beginning teacher-mentor work together including the mentor-mentee goal setting plans, and pre- and post-classroom observation notes. All participants have been protected with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was an iterative process, as our study was shaped in reaction to data collection and emerging findings (Merriam, 1998). All of the conversations from monthly meetings, and interviews with individual teachers and the principal were transcribed verbatim. We reviewed the data during the study and after, summarizing formative interpretations of data with analytic memos. These analytic memos summarized themes of conversations and helped us pay attention to issues that mentors and beginning teachers were focusing on during our meetings. The two researchers then met together to discuss findings from the meeting transcriptions, talking aloud about ways in which research literature, our program development ideas and the focus of talk of the mentors and principals were guiding our work and our findings. We transcribed our research analysis conversations, for initial coding was important to emerging analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To triangulate the data and provide an outside perspective, an outside researcher joined the team after the study was complete. The three of us then re-read the multiple sources of data, first making notes and forming initial codes (Creswell, 1998) building tentative themes that led to the final categories of our findings.

Findings

The findings indicate three themes: 1) Tensions in negotiating our induction work together; 2) Variations in mentoring practices, and 3) Mentoring beyond survival.

Tensions in negotiating our induction work together
In our initial conversation with the five mentors, beginning teachers, and the principal, we described our vision that together we would develop a mentoring model that would support the improvement of beginning teachers’ classroom practice. We discussed the expectations, jointly negotiated the time commitment, and reviewed our intention to introduce new dimensions of mentoring work. Through role playing, discussions, video cases, and practice with reflective questions, the mentors had opportunities and resources to build their repertoire of skills. Although there was monthly support provided, several tensions surfaced as we implemented the plan.

The first tension surfaced as we enacted a plan for the teachers to spend time together in regularly planned mentor-mentee conversations. When the mentors and mentees were asked to hold at least one conversation between monthly meetings, many of the pairs scrambled to hold a conversation the night before our next meeting. Several beginning teachers and mentors commented that squeezing in the conversations made them “feel fake, like a course assignment,” and commented to the principal, “This isn’t what we expected.” They resisted audiotaping conversations, though we had hoped for this critical data for analysis. The mentors chose to do the work between monthly meetings without classroom release time, choosing a stipend instead of substitute release. We had hoped that by honoring their choice for when to engage in mentor-mentee conversations, they would feel invested in the process.

A second tension developed as we supported the mentoring pairs to work together on a structured joint task activity focused on an instructional goal. We used a whole group meeting to develop an instructional goal to serve as a focus for their initial discussions. When the beginning teachers first met with a university representative, they openly listed their classroom challenges, including worries about specific students, specific knowledge of child development at their grade
level (Am I pushing enough? Expecting too much?) and lesson planning (pacing, content, strategies). At the same time, the mentors met with another university representative to discuss the rationale for goal-setting and to walk through an open-ended planning format for them to plan and define goals with their mentees. However, when the pairs met together to identify a goal, none of the specific concerns voiced by the beginning teachers were present. Instead, the goal setting protocol was used to brainstorm large goals of “becoming proficient with technology,” “writing the social studies curriculum,” and “making a curriculum map for science” in ways that made the task unauthentic.

At the next monthly meeting, when we asked the pairs to revisit and discuss their goals, neither mentors nor mentees described ownership or success in working on these goals together. Since this was the first joint task, the lack of success carrying out this activity had implications for future joint task activities including observation and feedback and analysis of student work. We learned that even with the support we provided, we could not assume the veterans had enough knowledge and ownership of these tasks to operationalize them with their mentees.

A third tension developed because of the “already knowing” factor in the school. The mentors equated good teaching with good mentoring. The norm of “already knowing” can prevent learning (Bridges, 2001). In this case, the notion of “already knowing” made our work seem intrusive because the veteran teachers considered themselves to be competent mentors. For the beginning teachers, “already knowing” meant that they were already supposed to know how to be expert teachers. These new teachers were praised for being the “fortunate hires into a premier school.” This made it difficult for the beginning teachers to appear vulnerable to the seasoned staff, as one beginning teacher said, “I feel honored and privileged to have this job…and I worry that I am not living up to everything that I can be, or their expectations.”
A final tension we experienced involved the principal’s role in the induction work. At the beginning of the school year the principal commented, “If I were going to say what my vision is, it isn’t so much specific to what a mentor should be; it’s that we don’t have a process in place, and that we have guidance for people… Here’s some support for you so that mentors understand too that these are the expectations.”

Yet, during the year the principal (Natalie) was openly skeptical as she remarked that we were introducing “a different paradigm.” We responded, “Exactly…we have been working within that tension here in your building. That idea of what a mentor is and what a mentor could be. We have been upfront by saying, ‘this is what we are trying to do. We are trying to shift your conversation.’” Natalie replied, “Again, you are defining mentoring in a very different way than what I have defined mentoring as, in the past.” The principal’s skepticism was prominent throughout the year.

Variations in Mentoring Practices

Through analysis of the data we found that each of the five mentors approached their work from a different perspective.

Carla: Mentor as expert resource

Throughout the school year Carla, an experienced teacher of 31 years, defined and enacted her role as an on-site, readily available expert. Her mentee, Kylee, would proudly explain that she could “run down to her (Carla’s) room whenever I have a question and she always makes time for me to answer them, also pretty much every time I see her at recess, in the workroom, at lunch (etc.). I have informal questions for her that she is always more than happy to answer. Finally she offers me full use of her supplies and resources as I need them.”
In this case, “the mentor as an expert resource” meant responding to the beginning teacher’s urgent needs. Efficiency seemed to be the norm for meeting informally and “on the run.” In a mentor meeting Carla described how she and her mentee “popped in and out of each other’s classrooms.” Carla explained that she regularly “pops in to ask, ‘how’s it going?’” rather than holding regular meetings with her mentee. Given the urgency of beginning teacher needs, efficiency often takes a priority, as it did with Kylee. She reported liking her mentor’s “open door” approach to mentoring. However, without taking time for mentor-mentee conversations between urgent situations, Kylee remained in the role of a novice who received information from an expert. There was little opportunity for reflection or feedback from the mentor. In this version of mentoring, power rested in controlling the resources (Morgan, 1996), making the beginning teacher dependent on the mentor.

_Kerry: Mentor as helpful resource_

Kerry, on the other hand, searched for balance between immediate needs and of her mentee and opportunities for growth. A mentor with 13 years of classroom experience, Kerry explained the juggle between telling and reflecting while working with beginning teachers when she said, “You try to find that ‘just right balance’ of giving the mentee space to experience things without feeling like you’re ‘supervising,’ but also not feeling like you’re leaving them out in the cold to figure everything out for themselves.” Kerry’s comments reflected her desire to figure out ways to be helpful in providing resources for the novices. Kerry was always eager to be helpful: “I met all the new teachers and we talked about helping them to start preparing for goal setting conferences. And I shared examples with them, I gave them the forms, and I shared some examples.”
Kerry was excited to share a mentoring experience during one of our monthly meetings. Her mentee, Alan, and the other beginning teachers, had asked for support with the science curriculum. Kerry decided to videotape a science lesson she taught to her own class. We were excited about this opportunity for Kerry to engage the beginning teachers in a discussion about this tape and encouraged this modeling and talk about practice. However, the next month we learned that Kerry had instead decided to give the video tape to her mentee who passed the tape around to the other beginning teachers. When we asked Kerry about bringing the novices together to discuss the video as a group, she hesitated. She left the video to be circulated among the beginning teachers, each expected to watch it on their own. Perhaps if we met together weekly instead of monthly as a university/school partnership, the opportunity to reflect with the mentors would have resulted in a more thoughtful use of the tape. Or perhaps the culture was not ready for a shared discussion that could either make a veteran teacher vulnerable or hold her up as an expert.

*Bill: Mentor as collegial support*

Bill’s practice as a mentor was shaped by his conception of mentoring as a colleague. He dismissed potential ways to think about mentor as teacher and said, “I don’t feel like a teacher (to the beginning teachers). They are your colleagues, we are both taking home a paycheck, we are both qualified.” Bill, who had taught for 17 years, resisted observing his mentee teach in the classroom. He said that he felt awkward asking reflective questions and providing feedback to someone just like him in a classroom next door. He was not able to envision a collegial form of mentorship in which both beginning and experienced teachers ask reflective questions, discuss teaching and learning, and learn from each other.
Early in the year Bill’s mentee, Alice, tried to seek support from Bill. She said, “…we have so many things that we need and…we have a lot of deadlines to meet and things that we personally want to do, and then you throw in things like the play, and it cuts back even more time…” Bill’s collegial response was, “I think that even the better teachers feel the same pressures, so once you’ve gone through things a few times, it’s a different kind of pressure.” In an after school mentor meeting, Bill described an occasion when Alice approached him for help with mathematics: “We discussed mainly the math curriculum and how we do Investigations, and how she really had to go through the units so thoroughly and really understand them, and I said, ‘we (veteran teachers) have to do the same.’” Although Bill may have comforted Alice with empathetic listening to show that new and experienced teachers alike feel pressure, he did not provide strategies to help Alice segment tasks, feel success from small accomplishments, or manage time. Because he viewed himself as a collegial mentor, ironically his vision seemed to prevent collegiality in the mentor relationship. Negotiating more time with Bill to engage in conversation about his mentoring practice may have encouraged him to think differently about his collegial relationship with his mentee.

The mentoring practice of these three mentors, Carla, Kerry, and Bill, did not shift across the year from mentoring for survival. Their visions, though they differed slightly, did not include a focus on helping a novice to develop her teaching practice. Consistent with the literature we found that Kerry and Bill were “hesitant to exert direct influence on novices’ instruction or learning to teach” (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 52). The three teachers were acting as a “local guide” whose role was to facilitate smooth entry into the profession, help novices negotiate policies, and solve immediate problems (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992). Overall, they enacted slightly
different ways of approaching buddy mentoring, as they provided advice, shared materials, and avoided observation of the novice’s practice (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

**Jake: Mentor as creative problem solver**

Jake, in his first year as a mentor, was a reflective listener and problem-solver eager to learn about mentoring. Throughout the year he studied his practice and tried to broaden his repertoire of mentoring moves. At the beginning of October Jake said, “Stacy came to me about an issue with a student in her room…and now she was asking me for my opinion…but I found that I wasn’t going to give one thing. Like, you know, this is what works best or anything. So I tried to give choices, like here’s a couple ideas, you can do this, you can do this, you know, and figure out…what’s best.”

In addition to suggesting a range of ways he might approach the situation, Jake went to see the class in action. By listening to his mentee’s needs, he was able to ask her questions about her decisions and help her look at alternatives that matched with her own developing style. His reflective nature was emphasized when he reminded his mentee to be sure the student knew why she made a certain decision.

Jake reported that he integrated what he learned from our after school mentor meetings into his practice. “That protocol book” (referring to questions we practiced during a meeting), “is really good. Saying, ‘did you ever think of this?’ Instead of saying ‘you should not do it that way.’” He explained that “it is so easy to give advice rather than to get them to think it through for themselves.” He also commented that without our mentoring program he would not have thought to go into his mentee’s classroom. “I would not have gone in there. Not because I was scared or anything. I just would have thought, ‘We’re fine, we talk about things.’ I really would not have. So in that way (the mentor program) was really effective.”
Dori: Mentor as reciprocal learner

Dori’s approach to mentoring was that of reciprocal learner: “I want Katie (mentee) to know that although I have been a teacher longer than her, I am still learning and I continue to have struggles, too. So I’m willingly to share these with her at times and have asked her for advice as well. I think it is important for her to see that we can both learn from each other.” By acknowledging the experience of mentoring as an opportunity for both the mentor and beginning teacher to learn, Dori’s vision of mentoring emphasized learning opportunities rather than resource giving. She, like Bill, saw the beginning teacher as a colleague. For Bill this view hindered his ability to facilitate conversations about teaching and learning. For Dori, who had been teaching for five years, the collegial relationship provided an opportunity for her own learning and inquiry as well as for offering support to the beginning teacher.

During their interactions Dori shared student work that could help Katie in her planning and expectations of student achievement: “I have given her examples of student work in reader’s workshop, for example, so that she has an idea of a possible end result from a certain lesson.” The two discussed ways they could both experiment with the use of Book Club, an instructional strategy introduced during Katie’s preservice program.

Jake and Dori’s approaches to mentoring embrace an educative stance, by moving beyond solving immediate problems to finding ways to invite and sustain inquiry about teaching practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Jake and Dori assisted their novices in identifying steps for growth, welcomed reflection, probed to clarify explanations, explored questions together, analyzed student work, modeled and encouraged problem-solving and were enthusiastic about continued learning together. Their beginning work as mentors moved toward a conception of
mentor as “co-thinker” who stands beside a novice, helping them see new perspectives (Feiman-Nemser, 1992).

*Mentoring for survival is not enough*

*Mentoring around instruction*

Across the year we designed and analyzed activities to address the variations in mentor practices. During the November group meeting we explained, “Conversation around an activity is meant to push them to a deeper conversation.” The principal replied, “or they might feel, ‘I don’t want to have a deeper conversation right now. I want to survive. I just want to get my work done. I want to be in my classroom.’”

Yet, during the same November meeting, Jake was not willing to settle for mentoring for survival. He said, “…we’re helping them just survive, and that shouldn’t be our role. I mean, there should be more to it. Jake’s remark “…I can’t sit here and say, ‘you know, I’m going to just help you survive, because that’s not what they want either,” was reinforced by the words of a beginning teacher, Keri who said in a meeting separate from the mentors, “We just work so hard at the beginning of the year setting up the management so that we can really get into the curriculum…but [now] really my main focus is curriculum …” We believed that mentoring in the classroom could help mentors support novices where they needed help the most, in their classroom with their curriculum and students, and could actually move novices out of survival mode sooner.

But Jake’s comments stood alone, as the principal stated that “the kinds of mentoring conversations we were promoting fit within a university culture, not the school.” She said, “I have been thinking these people should be getting credit for this because of the amount of
learning.” Another mentor echoed, “Are we talking about improving instruction? No, but we’re talking about things…again this is survival, something that they have to do.”

*Pushing for a norm of conversation about teaching and learning*

We believe that novices need opportunities to be observed by their mentors and assisted to reflect on their practice (Kelley, 2004). As we worked with the mentors on observation and coaching strategies, it became clear they did not have experience observing and guiding beginning teachers to reflect about their teaching practices, nor did they understand the difference between assistive and evaluative feedback. As collaborating teachers for university interns, they may have been accustomed to directing preservice teachers and aiding the university supervisor in determining a grade (Slick, 1997) rather than assisting colleagues in developing their own practices. Therefore, we planned several learning sessions that included practice providing assistive feedback through role play sessions, posing questions, and discussing scenarios of beginning teachers. We also held a discussion about a video tape of a mentee/mentor conversation, and we practiced assistive feedback based on data collected during a classroom observation.

After we viewed a mentoring video clip together, the principal spoke about how she enjoyed the way we were talking about questioning skills for the mentors. Yet she did not believe we should use these skills with the novices. She responded, “I think, that is too much or too early for the (first year teachers). I don’t know.” Another mentor, Kerry agreed with the principal, “When I’m meeting with my mentee there is a pressing issue at the time….I was thinking as I was watching the video, ‘that’s really nice, but that’s not where we are at right now…I got an email from Alan that was like, Can you help me with the CD, the music part…and then there was sort of this P.S., Also, will you help me with the next science unit.’ But the CD
was more important right now, and the science part, let’s get to it whenever.” We agreed that mentors need to provide assistance in meeting immediate needs of beginning teachers but we also believed conversations about teaching and learning could occur.

When the mentors actually did go into the classroom, Dori and Jake were eager to analyze their approach to the work of observing and providing feedback to a colleague. Dori said, “I love to listen to her… Where it felt weird was afterwards when we had to have that conversation, because I needed to phrase things in a way that I am not evaluating her…I tried to give some advice, but it just felt weird, probably because it was my first time ever doing it.” Jake added, “I went in there. I saw her as a colleague and then here I was supposed to be giving her tips and I did not feel comfortable being ‘that person.’ To actually go in there and give advice on instruction, I feel like I have advice but I feel weird giving it.”

Yet, Jake and Dori described ways in which they began to develop a broader repertoire of mentoring that moved beyond giving advice. Jake said, “I think that not always giving advice [is a coaching skill]. Dori added, “It is really practicing questioning…I am trying to phrase advice in question form so she has to think through it. What I suggest might not be her style, but she can take the question and make it fit her style.” Jake also said, “Saying, ‘Did you ever think of this?’ instead of saying, ‘You should not do it that way.’ It is so easier to give advice than to get them to think it through for themselves…It sounds corny when you are asking those questions and practicing, but if you really listen it helps.”

Discussion

Through analysis of the findings we realized that in this school culture “by the nature of the talk they hear, the advice they are given, the meetings they witness, and the appraisals they receive, teachers learn a stance toward classroom practice” (Little, 1982, p. 339). Their stance
was embedded in the expectation to be the best teachers who already knew how to teach. Such a vision left novices largely alone to fit into already established norms and left the university outside of conversations about continuing to learn to teach. They were immersed in “a veteran-oriented professional culture, where the workplace norms were set by veteran teachers” (Johnson, 2004, p. 141). Interestingly, the mentors with the fewest years of experience developed instructional mentoring practices that helped shift the discourse toward collaboration and shared learning. In this section we discuss successes and barriers to implementation and describe ways in which this work had significant implications for our continuing program development in induction. The three topics for discussion include: Selection and preparation of mentors; the power of principals in creating a culture of strong induction support; and finding a space for university faculty in school-based induction.

Selection and Preparation of Mentors

This study confirmed that the selection and preparation of mentors is instrumental in the success of strong mentoring (Gless, 2004). The mentors in this study were selected by the principal prior to our arrival. We attempted to prepare the mentors through the use of research-based protocols that emphasized the goal of improving student learning through focus on teaching practice, activities that emphasized curriculum and pedagogy, and opportunities to observe various perspectives and reflect on these experiences (Hiebert, 1999). As Jake reflected at the end our work together…”not all people should be mentors. Even people that have good personalities, they are not always a good fit for a mentor. They want to give advice all of the time…”

Understanding the Power of the Principal in Creating a Culture of Strong Induction Support
This study has raised issues about the ways in which a principal fosters a culture where instruction-based induction support can flourish (Sergiovanni, 2001). Although the principal advocated that the mentors be part of a formalized program with high expectations, she promoted talk about survival. At the November meeting with the mentors the principal said, “I’m not disappointed, don’t take me wrong, but it seems like there’s an agenda here as far as what we’re going to move through with both the mentees and the mentors and I feel like right now, we’re not ready to go…we are still in the survival stage, we’re not ready…let’s spend the first year, instead of overwhelming people, instead of talking any more pedagogy that we really do just talk about your feelings right now…” She clearly wrestled with her own conception of what strong induction support can be as she stated: “We have to provide a safety network and I know it is not just the psychological piece, or the friendship, feel good thing; it is questioning your practice. My concern is that what this does is make the first years feel more overwhelmed than less overwhelmed.”

We agree that an induction program needs to balance attention to immediate needs and instructional development. But the principal’s open skepticism could have shaped attitudes for teacher learning (Sergiovanni, 2001). “There is just a huge commitment there using the model that you have put in place.” We wonder how the project would have unfolded if the principal had openly supported the work with the lens that beginning teachers might feel emotionally and professionally supported with more talk about teaching and learning. A culture that takes mentoring seriously supports work norms that value everyone’s unique place (Johnson & Kardos, 2004). Such an environment is organized for teacher learning, where feedback on practice, organized time and space for observations and co-planning are the norm (Little, 1999).

*Finding a Space for University Faculty in School-Based Induction*
Even though we desired a shared vision, our presence during monthly meetings was too minimal for that to occur. We believe a stronger presence was needed for continued negotiation in establishing mutual understanding of and respect for a set of common goals (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Our time together was not enough to support mentors in the daily enactment of mentoring practices. Established teachers needed more university time and support to analyze their beliefs and consider new lenses for their work in guiding beginning teachers. In retrospect, we believe weekly sessions could have provided time for the mentors to think and talk about mentoring as an educative endeavor. In addition, we would add individual mentor-beginning teacher sessions to support teachers through specific feedback about his/her practice. Since we advocated “mentoring in the classroom,” some of our professional development should have taken place in the classroom while watching and learning from mentor-novice interactions.

*Implications for Current Induction Work*

This pilot study provided opportunities, on a small scale in one school setting, to analyze challenges in developing, enacting, and analyzing mentoring that focuses on teaching and learning. The pilot had significant implications for our current induction work in a mid-size urban district where we are providing some level of university-based induction support for all of the beginning teachers (N=102) and are preparing eleven veteran teachers, released one day each week, to mentor three beginning teachers (N=33 beginning teachers total).

The lessons learned from this pilot had implications for the way we are designing district level and principal support, selecting and preparing mentors, and integrating university support for beginning teachers. For example, a vision statement for the goals of our induction program was co-created by university faculty, principals, teachers and the union. Principal representatives have been involved in decision making from the ground up through participation in a principal
breakfast series. The preparation of our eleven partially released mentors is rigorous and sustained, including participation in weekly study groups led by university faculty and retired K-12 teachers and consultations with national induction experts. In addition to weekly visits in the beginning teachers’ classrooms, the mentors apply what they learn as they lead a monthly seminar with their group of beginning teachers. Finally, the beginning teachers in the district participate in four after-school seminars during the year, as well as two full-day retreats, co-led by university and school faculty. These sessions are designed to provide beginning teachers with a space to connect with other novices, process their challenges and successes, and continue to develop their vision of teaching.

As a result of the pilot work reported in this study, we are working hard to be more sensitive to the potential tension between our goals and expectations and the school context. We have spent more time developing co-learning tasks that build trust and help mentors articulate a vision of teaching that we are together mentoring toward. A central focus of the work has become participating side-by-side with the beginning teachers, mentors, principals, and district-level administrators to co-create induction as a shared phase in learning to teach between schools and university.
References


