

Divergent Perceptions: New teacher challenges in 2 large urban districts

- New teacher challenges more acute in urban districts characterized by student poverty concentration, low morale, scarce resources & limited parent involvement (Colbert, 1992; Tillman, 2005)
- New teacher retention grave problem facing urban school districts → induction/mentoring programs
- Large body of research identifies new teacher challenges - none explore discrepancies in perceptions of those charged with supporting them.

Conceptual Framework

- Disconnects between supports offered and actual support needs of new teachers
- One's perspective depends on position one holds (Charon, 1995).
 - Mentors and principals hold higher status positions, more power, & further removed from their own 1st year teaching experiences
- Actors hold better perspective than observers & are more cognizant of the determinants of their behavior (Small & Peterson, 1981).
- Triangulated approach can strengthen understanding of the disconnects.

Method

2006-2007
Year 1

2007-2008
Year 2

2008-2009
Year 3

2009-2010
Year 4

2010-2011
Year 5

Instrument
Development

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Cohort 1, n=40

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Cohort 2, n=40

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Cohort 3, n=40

Focus: 2 large urban districts

	Students	% African-American	% Free-reduced lunch	# middle schools
District A	100,000	36	56	22
District B	70,000	46	64	35

District A: State Mandated New Teacher Induction Program

- Committee comprised of principal, resource teacher/mentor & university teacher educator that guide and assess teacher in 1st year.

District B: No State Mandates but implemented formal mentoring program for all new teachers

- Collaborative effort between school district & teachers union to hire and train mentors

Method

■ Research Questions

1. How do new teachers' perceptions of challenges they face compare with mentors' and principals' perceptions?
2. What does the discourse of each group regarding new teacher challenges reveal about perceptions of the causes of such challenges?

■ EXPLORATORY

- District Level - Pilot for future analysis matching new teacher, principal and mentor within the same school

Method

- Focus Group Samples
 - 3 with new middle school math teachers (n=8)
 - 2 with principals (n=8)
 - 3 with mentors (n=15)
- Questions regarding new teacher experiences with induction, mentoring, sources of support and challenges.
- Transcripts analyzed inductively to identify primary themes and dominant patterns related to challenges

Findings

■ Chief Discrepancies:

- **Access to resources:** Struggle to get basic and math related materials
 - Mentors and principals did not mention as challenge
- **Preparing for start of school:** Lack of guidance, support and preparation time; feeling unwelcome.
 - Mentors and principals did not mention as challenge
- **Difficult teaching assignments:** Low ability level of students; intense daily schedule
 - Mentors perceptions converged
 - Principals' did not:

“I think a lot of them aren't prepared to put the time in that it takes to have a full class load. I mean I think they're in shock that-, you mean this is really not a thirty-five hour a week-, it says seven hours a day on the thing (all principals chuckling)”

Findings

- **Curriculum/Pacing:** Lack of clarity and direct guidance about what they should be teaching; aligning with curriculum map; pacing related to low ability level
 - Principals and mentors did not mention as curricular related challenges but several in district B noted pacing as challenge
- **Accountability/Testing:** too many tests; teaching to the test
 - “You [the principal] don’t want us to teach to the test, but you put pressure on us about the test. Cause if the test scores aren’t good, it’s our fault. So that is the biggest pressure I think”*
 - District A mentors and principals perceptions did not converge; In district B they did
- **Procedures/Logistics/Administrative Duties:** Absence of direct communication and guidance
 - Principal and mentor perceptions converged - principals described as lack of organization on part of teacher

Findings

- **Mandates of Mentoring Program (A):** Paperwork and observations – program described as not helpful/stressful

“[the mentoring program] really makes you on guard ‘cause their job is to critique you. ... You’re on pins and needles and you don’t really get the feedback that you need. Or you feel scared to even ask questions. It’s actually horrible. ... I’d say [mentoring program] probably works backwards for the teachers that are in it.”
- Neither principals or mentors noted as challenge and in fact described as helpful.
- **Classroom Management:** less than ½ of new teachers described as difficulty
- Nearly all principals and mentors described as challenge

Discussion

- Finding revealed some critical chief disconnects
- New teacher discourse indicated sense of isolation and unsupportive professional school culture
- Discourse of several principals and mentors revealed a deficit orientation towards the new teacher

Implications

- Concerted effort to understand the real/actual struggles they are encountering (policy, teacher ed).
- Policies/practice should make certain to address issues that may currently be overlooked, or perhaps currently are considered a non-issue.