

From Collegial Support to Critical Dialogue: Including New Teachers' Voices in Collaborative Work

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New teachers enter the field with a passion for making a difference with students, their newly gained knowledge from their preparation experiences, and a sense that there is still much to learn. Faced with the same responsibilities as their experienced colleagues, new teachers also enter the field looking for ways to cope with, adjust to, and survive the challenges they encounter on a daily basis (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). As such, most new teachers desire continued support, guidance, and learning opportunities in their first few years of teaching. They hope that much of this support will come from their colleagues (Costigan, Crocco, & Zumwalk, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Public Education Network, 2003).

A growing research base suggests that many new teachers find the support they need through collegial interaction. Support from peers and mentors is a key influence on new teacher effectiveness (Behrstock-Sherratt, Bassett, Olson & Jacques, 2014; Public Education Network, 2003), and teachers who experience collegial interaction and support tend to exhibit higher rates of retention in the profession (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Weiss, 1999). Additionally, meaningful and supportive collegial interactions have been associated with positive outcomes for students and teachers, including higher teacher satisfaction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, Kraft & Papay, 2012), greater adaptability to change (Nias, 1989), improved teacher development (Borko, 2004; Drury & Baer, 2011; Elmore, 2004; Hopkins, Beresford, & West, 1998) and learning (Goddard, 2000; Horn 2005; Horn & Little, 2010; Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010; Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijssels, 2011), and increases in student achievement (Goddard, 2000; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

While there is good reason to believe that opportunities for workplace interaction will benefit teachers, it is important to note that there is no guarantee that it will (Levine, 2011; Slavit, Kennedy, Lean, Nelson, & Deuel, 2011). Whether teachers learn what they need to know in the early years of teaching through collegial interaction depends largely on the culture of teaching that new teachers encounter. In her early study of teacher collaboration, Eddy (1969) argued that as new teachers try to make sense of what is going on in their classrooms, the explanation and advice they encounter from

more experienced colleagues affects their professional stance, practice, and attitude. Described as “painful to read,” Eddy’s study illustrated how veteran teachers’ advice led new teachers to create classroom routines that subordinated urban students and to ascribe difficulties they encountered in the classroom to traits they associated with students and families (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 3). Rather than creating opportunities for positive growth and development, workplace interaction between new and experienced teachers produced detrimental effects that “perpetuated systemic inequities that still plague education today” (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 3).

Guided by research that extols the promise of teacher collaboration while also warning that “much of what passes for collaboration does not add up to much” (Little, 1990, p. 508), this study explores 17 novice teachers’ experiences of collegial interactions in their first year of teaching. Using ideas presented in Little’s (1990) analysis of collegial interactions as a framework, we identified the types of collegial interactions that these new teachers experienced. Two of these types, *aid and assistance* and *sharing*, were most frequently described by the new teachers in our study and were consistent with Little’s framework. The third, which we term *critical dialogue*, was described by only a handful of the new teachers and did not fully map onto any component of Little’s framework. Thus, we present this new category in addition to the other two. While most of these teachers were pleased with the interactions they had with colleagues, their roles in these interactions varied, as did their descriptions of the potential the interactions had in helping them critically examine and improve their pedagogy. Only those who experienced critical dialogue actively engaged in deep conversations about practice and, in so doing, had the potential to gain the necessary learning and support for success and retention in the first few years of teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Critical dialogue creates a venue where all voices are valued and where teachers can work together toward shared answers to problems of practice that are relevant to all. It provides the type of meaningful, context-specific professional learning that is vital for all teachers but especially those launching their teaching career (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Elmore, 2004; Yoon et al., 2007).

Background

New teachers face a host of challenges as they embark upon their first year in the classroom. To effectively meet the complex challenges of teaching, novice teachers need opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills during the induction years (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As noted by Little (1999), “The learning demands that inhere in that work [teaching] cannot be fully anticipated or met by pre-service preparation, even when that experience is stellar” (p. 234). Unfortunately, many new teachers are left without supports for their ongoing learning. While many may encounter brief induction programs or have access to a mentor, they find themselves without the kinds of comprehensive learning opportunities needed for further growth and improvement (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2012; Johnson, 2004). Teachers lacking such support are most likely to leave at the end of their first year (Ingersoll, 2003).

Collegial interaction and support is particularly important for new teachers. In fact, those novices who are unable to create supportive relationships with their colleagues are more likely to leave their schools and leave teaching altogether than those who did establish such supports (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Work on effective supports of novice teachers from the New Teacher Center confirms the importance of collaborative learning and integrating frequent opportunities for dialogue with seasoned teachers as a critical component of their novice teacher support model (Sun,

2012). Opportunity for work and dialogue with a mentor is also a critical component of the model for new teacher induction promoted by Smith and Ingersoll (2004).

Learning in collaboration with one's colleagues optimizes teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Horn, 2005; Horn & Little, 2010; King & Newmann, 2000; Little, 1993, 1999; Shulman & Shulman, 2004) and is likely to result in increased teacher skills, higher expectations for students, and more pedagogical innovation (Borko, 2004; Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002). Collaborative work also presents increased opportunities for learning by allowing teachers to engage in "professional dialogue" (Rosenholtz, Bassler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 1986) or "principled talk" (Horn & Little, 2010). Additionally, such work can provide teachers with opportunities for reflection (Rosenholtz, et al., 1986), which Shulman and Shulman (2004) say is "the key to teacher learning and development" (p. 264). Given these benefits, collaboration for new teachers is particularly vital. Not only can it provide crucial instructional support and learning in a teacher's early years, it also helps these teachers build an understanding of the organizational components of their schools.

Theoretical Framework

Little (1990) describes four forms of collaboration: storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing, and joint work. She situates these types of interactions on a continuum ranging from independent to interdependent. With each successive shift, Little claims that "the warrant for autonomy shifts from individual to collective judgment" (p. 512). Each form of collaboration is briefly described below.

When engaging in storytelling and scanning for ideas, according to Little (1990), teachers exchange experiences, gather information, and nourish friendships. Such interactions preserve the independence of the teachers involved. With aid and assistance, teachers independently seek out advice from one another, a move that may yield teaching ideas but fails to provide opportunities to discuss those ideas with others. When teachers engage in sharing, they exchange ideas and materials, but the results of this sharing often differ depending on the schools' norms and culture. With sharing, teachers still determine the utility of shared ideas largely independently. When teachers engage in joint work, they share responsibility for the work of teaching, adopt collective conceptions of accountability, and support teacher initiative and leadership; as such, joint work is inherently interdependent.

Little's (1990) continuum also identifies the degree of interdependence in teachers' interactions. Task interdependence varies on a continuum from low to high. Interactions that are low on the interdependence scale require individual contributions to others but not direct interaction with others. High task interdependence exists when each individual's outcome is affected by the actions of others, enabling individuals to interpret cues in a similar manner, make compatible decisions, and take appropriate action (Katz-Navon & Erez, 2005, p. 444). Recent research underscores the importance of task interdependence in collegial interactions that produce teacher learning (Runhaar et al., 2010).

We used Little's (1990) framework to analyze the experiences of new teachers in this study. Ultimately, as noted above, novices in this study generally fit into two of the categories outlined by Little: aid and assistance and sharing. While the novices did not share any accounts of joint work with colleagues, there were rare accounts of interactions that went beyond aid and assistance and sharing. During these interactions, novice teachers and their more experienced colleagues engaged in "risky" behaviors associated with instructional improvement, namely publicly reflecting on their own practice and seeking feedback from others (Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011). These

interactions went beyond simple sharing in that teachers invited a critical examination of their work. Yet, the consequences of these interactions were felt only by individual teachers and lacked the interdependence needed to meet the standard that Little lays out for joint work. Thus, we identified a new category, *critical dialogue*, to tell a story about the specific needs and supports experienced by the novice teachers in this study.

The Study

This study draws on longitudinal interview data from 17 novice teachers, all who graduated from the same university-based teacher education program, leading to an M.Ed. Each of the 57 graduates of the program was invited to participate in the study. Of those 57, 22 responded to our initial call to participate. Due to geographic limitations as well as graduates' teaching plans post graduation, we chose to include 17 individuals in our sample. Among them were 14 women and 3 men. Two identified themselves as people of color, and 15 identified themselves as Caucasian. In all, the sample of novice teachers in this study mirrors that of the teaching force in the country, with the large majority being White and female (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013).

We conducted two semi-structured, one-hour interviews with each participant using a protocol comprised of open-ended questions that asked participants to reflect on their experiences as first-year teachers. The first set of interviews, conducted shortly after program graduation in May, revealed that most hoped they would find jobs in schools with collegial and collaborative work environments. They hoped to rely on colleagues to "learn the ropes" and to continue to develop their practice during their first years on the job. We interviewed participants again toward the end of their first year of teaching. During this second round of interviews, we investigated how they described the 15 different schools in which they ultimately took jobs and whether these school contexts fulfilled their hopes for collegiality and collaboration. Our work was driven by the following research question: *How do 17 first-year teachers describe the collegial supports that they received in their first year of teaching?*

Data analysis took place in multiple phases. Following transcription, we piloted a set of codes to apply to the data. We used both emic and etic codes, following a hybrid approach to the development and use of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This allowed us to draw not only on themes that emerged from the data but also to look for ideas present in the literature on new teacher support and learning. After piloting our codes and agreeing on a common set, multiple members of the research team coded transcripts to ensure that codes were applied accurately. Following initial coding, we looked across novice teachers' interviews to uncover patterns and consistencies among their experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Our initial analytic process revealed the importance of different types of collegial interactions in these new teachers' induction experiences. Based on these early patterns, we introduced Little's (1990) framework of collegial interactions to guide our next phase of analysis. In parsing out different types of collegial interactions, the framework allowed us to look more closely at the variation in novice-colleague interactions experienced by our participants. Ultimately, however, we determined that the continuum did not fully account for the range of novice-colleague interactions we were observing in our data. This led to the creation of a new category capturing novice interactions.

Findings

Little (1990) argued that most interactions among teachers actually do very little to diminish the culture of isolation that teachers experience in many schools. Indeed, though, teachers in this study described each type of collegial interaction as a source of support. In most instances, they did not have opportunities to evaluate and critique practices with their colleagues—opportunities that we argue have the most value for new teachers' practice—and thus, independently made decisions about whether to implement the ideas shared by their colleagues. For any new teacher, such decisions are informed by little experience in the field and may be driven more by the opinion of colleagues, perceptions of what others in the school do, or a perceived pressure to comply with a school's culture.

In only a few instances were new teachers in this study engaged in discussing and critically evaluating practice with their colleagues. We term these interactions *critical dialogue* and distinguish them from Little's conception of joint work as they did not seem to entail shared responsibilities for teaching nor deeply rooted, collective conceptions of accountability. At the same time, we also acknowledge that a few of our participants did not experience supportive collegial interactions at all, resulting in an experience of isolation. Though not a narrative of collegial interaction, we believe isolation is an important novice experience to capture and present alongside narratives of interaction. Highlighting this isolation points to the detrimental nature of such an experience for some new teachers.

Analyzing Collegial Interactions

Isolation. Unlike the majority of our participants who described being supported by one or more types of collegial interactions, four participants experienced isolation from their colleagues. These novices largely found themselves alone in their work, and most seemed unprepared for and disheartened with the experience.

Kim represented the sentiments of the other three isolated teachers. She described her surprise at just how isolated she was during her first year: "I know that a lot of teaching time is alone, but I don't think I realized how much alone time I'd have and I don't think I realized how much I'd miss some of the collaboration last year" [in her teacher education program]. Kim went on to explain that she sees her new school as void of conversations about teaching practice. She said, "We never talk about practice at the school I am at now. We have not had one conversation about anything related to teaching, and that is kind of killing me." As a teacher whose preparation program included working collaboratively with other preservice teachers and experienced mentor coaches, the experience of isolation was particularly shocking and disheartening.

Aid and assistance. Most of the teachers in our study who experienced some type of supportive collegial interaction described at least one instance in which a colleague offered assistance or aid of some form or another. This is to be expected—most teachers expect to give advice when colleagues ask for it, but only when they ask for it (Little, 1990). As Little points out, "the principle limitation is that questions asked by one teacher of another are interpreted as requests for *help*" (p. 516). In these interactions, participants were the recipients of ideas and resources for curriculum and pedagogy that they deemed useful, but they did not contribute to the exchanges themselves. In the end, they took colleagues' advice, but in line with the norms of privacy that continue to dominate the profession (Lortie, 1975), they still made decisions about pedagogy and practice independently, figuring out how best to use the ideas from their colleagues (if at all). Although the new teachers who described aid and

assistance appreciated the ideas and resources they received and felt supported by them, the independent nature of novices' evaluations of their colleagues' ideas is particularly challenging for teachers just entering the career, as they do not yet have a fully developed sense of quality instruction.

Jenny, for example, described many interactions with colleagues that we consider examples of aid and assistance. She had a mentor teacher and an assistant principal who checked in with her, asked what she needed, and provided ideas for planning and classroom management. She noted, "I feel like everyone's always looking out for us [the new teachers]. I have teachers sometimes who just come up to my classroom and say, 'How's it going?'" In all of these collegial interactions, Jenny's role was exclusively that of recipient of ideas and resources. During the interactions, Jenny did not share her teaching ideas with her colleagues. Moreover, once she received suggestions and resources from her colleagues, Jenny was left alone to make decisions about how or whether to use them.

Our analysis revealed that participants experienced aid and assistance in many different ways. Some participants were expected to participate in planned, regular meetings with mentors, department heads or other novices, and they received ideas and resources in these settings. Other participants experienced aid and assistance informally and spontaneously, such as when teachers checked on Jenny to see how she was doing. In some cases, the participants themselves initiated these interactions. For example, Jill said, "I feel like I have the power to sort of ask for the help that I need... I don't feel isolated with my questions or problems." According to participants, both formal and informal aid and assistance were equally helpful. They described feeling supported with ideas about curriculum and pedagogy as well as knowing that other teachers were looking out for them. Furthermore, participants believed all of the forms of aid and assistance they experienced provided them opportunities to learn new teaching strategies and acquire the resources they needed, even though the interactions did not indicate a real shift away from the isolated practice that many of the new teachers in the study did not want to experience upon entering the field.

Sharing. Many of our participants also mentioned at least one collegial interaction that Little (1990) defined as *sharing*. These interactions differ from those categorized as *aid and assistance* because they involve a reciprocal exchange between new teachers and their colleagues, where both the new teacher and her colleagues shared ideas related to teaching. However, like aid and assistance, new teachers who experienced sharing still made decisions about pedagogy and practice largely independently. Though there was an exchange of ideas, participants did not describe discussions about how to implement or revise the ideas to fit their needs or their students' needs.

Janet, for example, described how she participated in an exchange with other members of her department through weekly correspondence. She said, "[T]he other physics teachers there are really supportive, and we meet every week and we email everything around to each other. I haven't had to create ... a totally new curriculum. I take stuff and modify it." In emailing curricular ideas and plans to one another, Janet was both a recipient and contributor in the exchange of ideas with members of her department. It is important to note, however, that even with this reciprocity, Janet was ultimately left alone to "take," "modify," and decide how and whether to use these ideas.

Jenny's descriptions of collegial interactions show how what begins as aid and assistance can evolve over time into exchanges more appropriately characterized as sharing. Jenny described her interactions with her mentor this way: "I can talk to her [my mentor] about anything, and she is a good listener and provides a lot of advice, when I feel like I need it. So, it's been very, very helpful . . . and now she asks me for advice. It's a really reciprocal relationship."

Not only did Jenny receive advice from her mentor, but over time, Jenny's mentor also started asking Jenny for advice. Jenny liked the fact that she not only had support from her mentor, but that her mentor also saw her as a source of knowledge about teaching.

Critical dialogue. Three teachers described collegial interactions characterized not only by a reciprocal exchange of ideas and information but also by critical conversations about these ideas. These instances were characteristic of the "critical collegiality" referred to by Lord (1994) and allowed the new teachers to give and receive ideas with their colleagues and engage in dialogue about those ideas. Since no teachers in the study described the type of shared instructional undertaking and interdependence in large segments of their work outlined by Little (1990) as joint work, we do not use that category here. Instead, we describe these novices' interactions as *critical dialogue*.

Carl described such critical dialogue with his colleagues: "Teachers [are] working together and solving problems and do progressive thinking about teaching rather than like the closed door, 'Just let me do my job' mentality. The English Department is a ... team." Carl thought *with* his colleagues about teaching and how best to meet students' needs. He felt supported by the process. The interactive component that he described as "solving problems" with these colleagues set apart his supportive collegial interactions from those who experienced *sharing* and had to evaluate the utility of colleagues' ideas independently.

Among teachers in the sample, only Josh's collegial experiences were overwhelmingly characterized as *critical dialogue* and may have also approached Little's conceptualization of joint work. Unfortunately, this indicates the overall scarcity of such experiences by novices in the sample. Like Carl, Josh used the word *team* to describe his interactions with his colleagues. His interactions were largely centered on improving practice—his own and that of other teachers. This was exemplified when he described working with his history colleagues in the following way:

And so ... we talk about ... how are we going to move students from A to B, how do we set our grades? How do we evaluate student work? All these conversations we've had. I've not only been supported in "this is how we do things," but also "what do you think about that?" "Should we, is this the best way to do things?"

In becoming part of this team, Josh had an opportunity that only a few novices in this study shared. He and his colleagues worked collaboratively toward improving his practice and the practice of others by discussing and reflecting critically on each other's ideas. These opportunities took place through conversations in which Josh's contributions were expected and solicited. Ultimately, these conversations resulted in shared decisions where everyone determined together "the best way to do things."

Learning Through Collegial Interaction?

Research on professional learning points to the importance of working with colleagues as teachers seek to gain new perspectives and approaches to their instruction (Borko, 2004; Elmore, 2004). Certainly for new teachers, opportunities for on-the-job learning are vital. Yet, few participants described the types of ongoing, in-depth conversations focused on practice that we know are crucial for learning among both novice and more veteran teachers (Borko, 2004; Parise & Spillane, 2010). Instead, participants' descriptions of collegial interactions all arose when answering questions about ways in

which they felt supported as novice teachers. Though the novice teachers in this study portrayed their interactions with colleagues in a positive light and conceived of them as supportive, the variety of interactions they experienced differed dramatically in their actual potential to provide support and shape these novices' professional learning and instructional practice. In this section, we explore the varied ways that aid and assistance, sharing, and critical dialogue shaped potential learning opportunities for new teachers.

Integrating new ideas into practice. Our analyses suggest that all types of collegial interactions we identified have the potential to convey subject and practice knowledge from one teacher to another, providing new teachers with ideas and resources to use as a basis for developing their curriculum and pedagogy. In this way, all of the supportive collegial interactions have the potential to contribute to new teachers' ongoing learning, an experience of particular import for novices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 1983, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Yet, the very fact of being novices means that these teachers require guidance in how, when, and if to utilize the ideas shared with them by colleagues. Without a space to discuss ideas together and shape them to best meet the unique needs of their students, suggestions from colleagues are unlikely to translate into meaningful learning and practices for novices.

Though sharing and critical dialogue seem to provide more valuable learning opportunities for novices, participants who experienced aid and assistance also praised the valuable curricular resources and information that these interactions provided them during their first few months of teaching. For example, Laura received aid and assistance from her department head that supported her curriculum planning. She said,

The head of the U.S. government team who's two doors down, I can go to her any time I need help planning U.S. government. She's been extremely helpful about giving me any materials she has, telling me what she's done, what she's doing.

It is no wonder our participants found exchanges such as this one supportive, as research shows that acquiring curricular resources is a primary concern for novices (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002), and curricular ideas were most often the focus of these exchanges.

Though experiences of aid and assistance provide novices with ideas and resources, they do not offer the new teacher opportunities to contribute to bi-directional exchange of information or to see herself as possessing a specific area of expertise, both of which are important for developing a sense of importance and worth and a place for oneself within the professional community (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002). In this way, sharing and critical dialogue have the potential to influence new teachers' experiences in ways that aid and assistance do not.

From the participants' perspectives, both sharing and critical dialogue address their basic needs for curriculum and information. Peggy described the added benefit of sharing that new teachers can experience when they feel that they are integral and valued members of a school or department. Peggy felt valued for her expertise and included within her professional community as a result of sharing her knowledge of physics with her colleagues. She described herself as a leader in that area of the curriculum when she said, "I'm the only person in the school I think with a physics background. So if there are physics questions, they come to me and ... I really feel like a leader in that." Unfortunately,

many new teachers are seen as “ailing” and in need of assistance; consequently, they are put in positions where their ideas and knowledge are undervalued, ignored, or even dismissed (Long, 2004; Meyer, 2002). When novices work in communities where their input is valued, it seems natural that other teachers would be more willing to learn from them. Thus, establishing that “new teachers ... have much to offer their colleagues” (Johnson, 2004, p. 162; see also Putnam & Borko, 2000) is a necessary antecedent to new teachers joining their colleagues in both sharing and critical dialogue.

Though the sense of being a valued member of a professional community is crucial, our analyses illuminate the fact that even active novice participation in collegial exchange (as with sharing) does not seem to have much bearing on encouraging a new teacher to reflect and think critically about her practice. When new teachers experience aid and assistance, its advantages are limited to the provision of curricular and pedagogical ideas and resources. When the exchange is bi-directional, new teachers are both providers and recipients of knowledge, but they may still be making most decisions about how to implement their newly received ideas independently. As novices, such decisions are necessarily *novice decisions*, informed only by their preparation, experiences, and their own time as students. Though extensive, such a foundation fails to provide a thorough knowledge base from which to make meaningful decisions with one’s specific students in mind. While teachers may be engaging in it independently, bi-directional exchanges may not promote critical reflection any more than uni-directional exchanges. In this study, critical dialogue, on the other hand, provided novices with opportunities for collective consideration of instructional practice. Yet opportunities for this were limited and seemed to occur only with the right combination of context and colleagues.

Bringing a critical perspective to collegial interaction. Even when participants were involved in the exchange of ideas and information in supportive collegial interactions, more often than not, they made decisions about whether and how to use the ideas and information on their own. For example, Molly described interactions with her colleagues that were clearly bi-directional. She said, “It’s very community-based. This unit is really in sync with each other. We always know what we’re doing, which is great, even just as far as planning. If I’m giving a big test, the other four teachers in the unit won’t.”

It is clear that these collegial interactions were supportive to Molly. In line with the norm of egalitarianism in the profession (Lortie, 1975), Molly did not, however, describe collaboratively reflecting on and critiquing curricular ideas and practice with her colleagues. Instead, it seems they were telling each other what they were doing but continuing to make decisions about pedagogy independently.

Similarly, Ruth described collegial interactions that fostered independent decision-making. She explained, “We have weekly meetings ... everybody always shares ... ‘do you have a lesson for this, a worksheet for that?’” Ruth may have picked up tips and ideas from such exchanges, but without critical, reflective conversations about these shared resources, it is unlikely that she improved her ability to decide how, whether, or when to utilize these lessons and worksheets. This lack of critical conversation about teaching practice is particularly glaring since opportunities to evaluate lesson plans, assessments, and student learning with colleagues are vital parts of all teachers’, and particularly novices’, learning (Borko, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, 2004; Lieberman, 1996).

Josh—the only participant who discussed extensive examples of critical dialogue—described frequent opportunities to reflect and deliberate about his practice with his colleagues. He seemed motivated by being seen as a valued contributor (Johnson, 2004; Kardos, 2004) but also recognized that

the collegial interactions he experienced benefitted him beyond his personal acquisition of new resources and ideas. Josh explained, “[My school is] a really good environment in which you can learn ... right from the start we [Josh and his department chair] were talking about content.” Josh went on to describe how they would deliberate the pros and cons of various curricular decisions. In discussing the way that he and his department chair puzzled through what they “were going to do,” Josh illustrated how this dialogue with his colleague provided him important opportunities for professional learning as he worked in concert with his department chair to make and then reflect on curricular decisions (Borko, 2004; Elmore, 2004; Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Goddard, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, 2007; King & Newmann, 2000; Little, 1993; 1999; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Rosenholtz et al., 1986). These experiences created a context in which “new collaborative relationships [were] being constructed that replace the novice-expert relationship” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 278), thus including Josh as an equal and valued member of a professional community.

Unfortunately, few participants experienced the in-depth support that stems from opportunities for critical dialogue, where they were able to discuss in an in-depth fashion the pros and cons of teaching ideas as well as ways to implement these ideas. In fact, only three participants described critical dialogue as a component of their collegial interactions. However, such occasions are vital to novice learning and growth. These types of interactions provide a space for new teachers to co-construct knowledge with their colleagues. Given the central role that collaboration plays in teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Elmore, 2004; Horn, 2005; Horn & Little, 2010; King & Newmann, 2000; Little, 1993, 1999; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Rosenholtz et al., 1986; Smylie, 1996), schools that do not provide such opportunities to their teachers, and particularly their novice teachers, place their staff and students at a disadvantage.

Looking for More Support

Despite the overwhelmingly positive picture of collegial support described by participants, some still spoke of a desire for more. For some, this was a desire for more instances of aid and assistance, sharing, or critical dialogue. For those who were isolated, it was a desire for *any* collegial interaction. While meaningful collaboration in which teachers discuss, evaluate, and create together has been linked both theoretically and empirically to optimized teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Horn, 2005; Horn & Little, 2010; King & Newmann, 2000; Lieberman, 1996; Little, 1993, 1999; Rosenholtz et al., 1986; Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Smylie, 1996), participants were not specifically seeking out opportunities for such collaboration. Since participants mostly asked for additional aid and assistance or sharing, it did not appear that they considered the benefits and drawbacks of various types of collegial interactions.

Jessie was one participant who did not experience very much collegial support; in fact, she described a context of isolation within her school. However, she did feel that it was possible to reach out for aid and assistance within her department: “I know ... the whole [science department] staff in general I could ask a question if I have [one]. I don’t feel afraid to ask questions, which is a good thing.” Jessie’s ability to seek out more support by going to colleagues to have her questions answered falls squarely in the domain of aid and assistance. While Jessie felt supported with the knowledge that she could ask her colleagues questions if necessary, such collegial interactions are unlikely to be a source of feedback (Smylie, 1996) or to lead to the kinds of “professional dialogue” (Rosenholtz et al., 1986) that result in powerful learning experiences. In all likelihood, Jessie was unsure of what questions to ask, or

even of what questions she might have, thus diminishing the ability to even seek out aid and assistance.

While some participants described reaching out to other teachers for aid and assistance, none of them described initiating critical dialogue with colleagues. The fact that few novices sought out such interactions is not surprising. As Peggy noted, "I don't even know what I need." It seems that these novices recognized their most immediate need for resources and ideas, but like Peggy expressed, they did not know how to seek critical exchanges; nor did they recognize the potential for learning and finding a home within a professional community held within such exchanges (Elmore, 2004; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Little, 1993, 1999; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Smylie, 1996). Unfortunately, Peggy exemplifies the majority of novice teachers who do not even know what they need in the domain of support. Without a sense of the benefits of critical interactions derived either from teacher education or induction experiences, one cannot hope that these teachers will seek out the types of learning experiences that would most benefit them. In fact, we believe that the responsibility for helping novices realize the benefits of such exchanges does not lie with them at all. Instead, preservice and in-service experiences must be explicitly structured for novices to build an understanding, over time, of the benefits of critical dialogue.

One participant, Naomi, did seem to recognize that differences exist in the kinds of support she could receive from her colleagues; however, she also recognized that her school and the teachers in it were not attuned to these differences: "... there are lots of people that I can go to for help, but teachers here are quite isolated from one another and ... their classrooms are their fiefdoms." In Naomi's case, though the teachers in her school may have been receptive to assisting her, she recognized and was disappointed in the fact that they still worked independently. It remains rare to find professional cultures that support teacher learning or that provide opportunities for a critical, collaborative examination of teaching practice (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Little, 1999). Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of teachers in this study found themselves in such cultures and did not seem to advocate for more critical interactions.

Finally, some participants wanted more collegial interactions, but the workload in their first year of teaching provided a disincentive for them to advocate for more time with their colleagues. For example, Kim said, "I think one of the challenges is just trying to find the time, because the end of the day comes and I'm exhausted and I just need a break." Because time is such a precious commodity for new teachers everywhere, when novices ask for more support, they may seek out less time-consuming interactions with their colleagues.

Whether participants expressed a desire for more supportive collegial interactions, our analyses show that though many of our participants felt very supported in their new roles as teachers, almost all of them needed more support. As Feiman-Nemser (2003) points out, there is a tension that often exists between satisfying the survival need of new teachers and encouraging their growth and development. Having basic survival needs met through aid and assistance and sharing, most of our novices did not seem to miss or call for the types of interactions that would arguably benefit their practice the most. What's more, participants who were best positioned to critique their induction experiences as a result of their isolation seemed to call only for support that addressed their survival needs as opposed to their growth needs.

Conclusions and Implications

Educational researchers agree on the important role collaboration plays in promoting teacher learning and development (Borko, 2004; Elmore, 2004; King & Newmann, 2000; Little, 1990, 1993, 1999; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Similarly, as more and more schools across the country implement professional learning communities (PLCs) as structures for teacher learning and instructional improvement, it is clear that policymakers and school leaders, too, value the potential that lies in collaborative structures and the conversations they can facilitate. Yet, we found that the new teachers in this study rarely experienced the deeply meaningful collegial interactions that hold this potential. Few novices noted or criticized the absence of critical dialogue during their initial months at their schools. While we are struck by the paucity of critiques by novices of their collegial interactions, we believe that the burden of educating new teachers about the benefits of critical dialogue lies not with the new teachers themselves but with their teacher education, induction, and school site experiences. Our findings reveal that it is imperative that these three entities attend to providing preservice and novice teachers with meaningful learning opportunities that include critical dialogue and arm them with the theoretical foundations that speak to the necessity and benefits of such in-service learning.

Learning in the Preservice Setting

The formal journey of learning to teach begins in preservice settings. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) notes, the goal of preservice teacher education is meaningful teacher learning. However, teacher education programs are too often bereft of opportunities for candidates to “cultivate habits of analysis and reflection” through collaborative work or by other means (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1020). It is imperative for prospective teachers to be introduced to the benefits of critical dialogue during their preservice years. New teachers must learn to identify collegial interactions that are truly collaborative and understand that carefully structured, critical conversations with peers can deepen their knowledge of pedagogy and practice.

Candidates might, for example, come together to collaborate in planning a unit of study for a methods class. They would receive guidance in the skills of careful collaboration, learning to think critically about each idea presented, giving thoughtful feedback, and creating a more rigorous unit responsive to students’ needs than would be possible if the work had been undertaken individually (Goddard et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2012; Thoonen et al., 2007). Exposure to opportunities such as this during teacher education programs may allow teacher candidates to directly experience the benefits of critical dialogue, which in turn may encourage them to look for such learning and support options in prospective job settings.

Learning Through Induction

Induction programs rely primarily on mentors to support new teachers. While frequently valuable as a source of aid and assistance or sharing, this support often does not include opportunities for critical dialogue about practice, where the mentor and novice puzzle through questions of curriculum and pedagogy together (and where the mentor, too, may take away great benefit from the interaction). This can be catalyzed through the creation of reflective, critical professional communities that include mentors and mentees, primarily novices, or teachers of mixed experience levels. We believe that induction programs provide fertile ground for the creation of such communities of teachers in which novices can be exposed to the benefits of critical dialogue.

This can be accomplished in at least two concrete ways. First, induction programs need to move beyond the traditional mentor-mentee dyad. Mentors need to be trained to support new teachers not just by providing them resources and ideas, but also by engaging them in critical and evaluative conversations about pedagogy and practice. For example, a novice may encounter opportunities in her weekly conversations with her mentor to reflect on the ways that they both have been introducing the concept of fractions to their classes, and they may plan together how best to take students' understanding to the next level. This type of conversation may take some time as novices acclimate to their work. However, we believe that critical dialogue within a mentor relationship can serve as a powerful learning source for both new teachers and their mentors by pushing these teachers' thinking and helping them to develop new approaches to their craft.

Second, induction programs should provide structured opportunities for larger groups of teachers to participate in critical conversations, as opposed to placing the entire responsibility for such dialogue on the mentor-mentee dyad. By incorporating opportunities for new teachers to articulate their ideas about curriculum and pedagogy and to critically discuss these ideas and those of others with different groups of colleagues (perhaps with the use of structured protocols or in PLC settings), induction programs can become loci of teacher learning as well as new teacher support. Furthermore, novices who receive induction that includes opportunities such as these may be more likely to see the benefits of such collaboration, and thus, they would be more inclined to seek out similar collegial interactions in their daily work in schools.

Learning at the School Site

Finally, our findings suggest the need for schools to place collaborative learning opportunities, and particularly critical dialogue, at the center of in-service learning for all teachers. This provides all teachers, no matter their experience level, opportunities for meaningful learning and improvement of their practice (Little, 1993, 1999; Smylie, 1996). Collaborative work among teachers boosts the potential of schools as organizations to achieve change and reform goals (Achinstein, 2002; Johnson, 1990; Johnson et al., 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). However, despite the schoolwide benefits of collaboration among colleagues, teachers rarely encounter authentic collaborative work opportunities (Borko, 2004; Little, 1999).

Restructuring teachers' work so that it includes plentiful opportunities for critical dialogue is a challenging undertaking. It requires schools to engage in cultural change, such that all members of a school community come to value collaborative work as a key component of instructional improvement efforts (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). We recognize the monumental nature of such cultural shifts, and like Rosenholtz et al. (1986), we are aware that "norms of collaboration do not just happen" (p. 93) and that school leaders must engage in thoughtful change initiatives in order to reshape professional norms amongst school staff. The move to incorporate PLCs into schools as a source for learning and change represents a strong move in this direction, though facilitation of authentic conversations that can lead to changed cultures within schools is often still necessary. However, the value of cultural changes that embrace critical dialogue as central to all teachers' work and to schoolwide improvement efforts will, we believe, be worth the Herculean efforts that may be required to get there.

When schools take seriously the role that in-depth collaboration can play in achieving goals for improvement, all teachers (and consequently students) will stand to benefit. New teachers have a greater potential to learn through such interactions with their colleagues. They, and we would argue

their veteran counterparts, too, stand to gain important insight into their practice from participating in such collaborations. For novices already saddled with the challenges of acclimating to life in the classroom, a school that embraces collaborative work will be particularly beneficial. When critical dialogue is an embedded norm within a school's culture, novices will find opportunities for such exchange scheduled into their workloads, as opposed to requiring them to take extra time out of their already busy lives to work collaboratively with their colleagues—or yet more challenging, to seek out or even create such collaborative work.

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