Speaking Up and Speaking Freely: Beginning Teachers' Critical Perceptions of Their Professional Induction

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Abstract

The induction of beginning teachers has assumed a burgeoning priority given existing North American preoccupations with teacher retention, state educational standards, and large-scale assessment. In Canada, and especially Ontario, school boards are following the lead of many American institutions in establishing key partnerships with university faculties of education and provincial governing bodies to best prepare and induct beginning teachers into the profession. The objective of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of 173 beginning teachers in Ontario participating in purposely selected exemplary induction programs. Four core categories emerged that showed conceptual differences in how teacher cohorts over a 2-year period understood their induction; namely, induction as exceeding beginning teachers' expectations, their appreciation of meaningful support, their recognition of teacher leadership, and the disconnect between in-services and practice. This study draws attention to the professional enculturation of beginning teachers, but more notably, compels a practical reconsideration of how induction is defined in light of beginning teacher growth and sustainability.

Introduction

The induction of beginning teachers has assumed a burgeoning priority given existing North American preoccupations with teacher retention, state educational standards, and large-scale assessment. In Canada, and especially Ontario, school boards are following the lead of many American institutions in establishing key partnerships with university faculties of education and provincial governing bodies to best prepare and induct beginning teachers into the profession. California, New York, and Ohio to name only three states, have partnered induction services at the local school board level with university faculties of education to develop, refine, and deliver teacher induction support services for beginning teachers.

Interest in teacher induction, considered as an extension of the learning from the preservice year, surfaced in Ontario in approximately 1988 (Cole & Watson, 1991; Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, Kay, & Edelfelt, 1989; Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1986). By 1991, however, only 19% of the province's 110 publicly funded school boards offered an orientation session and mentoring component to their induction programs (Cole & Watson). Given the fact that orientation and mentoring support services contribute to beginning teacher efficacy and pedagogical practice (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Olebe, 2005; Tickle, 2000), the relatively low rate of participation by the province's school boards was problematic. To compound the issue, research substantiated the fact that beginning teachers receive equally difficult or more strenuous teaching assignments than their experienced colleagues (McIntyre, 2002a), and as a result attrition is highest within the first 5 years (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997). Interestingly, a Canadian Teachers' Federation (2000) survey reported that in excess of 60% of Ontario school boards still considered teacher retention as problematic.

The Ontario College of Teachers (2003), as the governing body for the province's 200,000 teachers, reported that of 6,800 Ontario teacher graduates, 51% indicated that they were satisfied with their school board orientation, while 21% rated their experience to be somewhat unsatisfactory, compared to 28% who concluded their orientation to be unsatisfactory or nonexistent (McIntyre, 2002b). Beginning teachers reported wanting their colleagues and school administrators to be candid in stating their responsibilities during orientation and felt confident in demonstrating their professionalism (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2002; McIntyre, 2003).

Leithwood, Fullan, and Watson's (2003) landmark report on education in Ontario recommended "collaborative partnerships between school boards, the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Ministry of Education to support teachers' professional development to enhance teaching" as one of the most powerful ways of improving student learning (p. 28). The literature alludes to the fact that beginning teachers who are successfully acclimatized to and supported by professional school cultures create, quite presumably, a more conducive learning environment for their students (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Rowen, Correnti, and Miller (2002) concluded that teacher effectiveness is directly correlated to student learning (Armour-Thomas, Clay, Domanica, Bruno, & Allen, 1989; Ganser, Marchione, & Fleisehmann, 1999; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).

This research study draws attention to the relational nature of inducting new teachers, but more significantly compels a practical reconsideration of how *induction* is defined in light of beginning teacher growth and sustainability.

Theoretical Grounding

Teacher induction is generally understood as "the support and guidance provided to novice teachers in the early years of their teaching careers" but remains rather illusory to precisely define (Bartlett, Johnson, Lopez, Sugarman, & Wilson, 2005, p. 5; Duncan-Poitier, 2005; Renard, 2003). Contemporary research literature identifies various components of successful induction programs. Olebe (2005) suggested that induction programs be responsive to the backgrounds of teachers and pupils and respect teachers' eclectic understandings of what it means to teach (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Tickle, 2000; Williams, 2003). Bartell (2005) concluded that induction programs be attentive to beginning teachers' "instructional, professional, cultural, and political needs" (p. 116) and be aligned with professional standards in a framework of critically reflective practice (Mitchell & Laidlaw, 1999; Portner, 2002). Moir and Gless (2001), among others, recognized the essential components of induction to include program vision (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2002), support from school board senior administration (Wong, 2002), a mentoring process (Bartlett et al.; Daresh, 2003; Wong), links to professional standards (Cantalini-Williams, 2005), and teacher learning based on classroom practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Tushnet et al. (2002) identified "intensive content-based opportunities [to encourage] in-depth understanding of content and new teaching methods" (p. 33) to prevent beginning teachers from becoming dispirited (Berry, Hopkins-Thompson, & Hoke, 2002).

Also of relevance to this study is the literature's account of successfully inducting beginning teachers into professional cultures as being dependent upon the collegial collaboration of supportive school communities (Duncan-Poitier, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Ohio Department of Education, 2004; Olebe, 2005). Nurturing school cultures also improves retention rates (Daley, 2002; Humphrey et al., 2000; Tushnet et al., 2002; Wong, 2002; Zachary, 2005). As Glassford and Salinitri (2006) stated, "not infrequently are

[beginning teachers] socialized to a mediocrity that works in limited ways, but shuts the door to continuous learning" (p. 1; see also Darling-Hammond, 1990; Ingersoll, 2001).

Method

The participants in Phase I of the study included 75 beginning teachers from school board A during the 2004/2005 school year. Phase II included 98 beginning teachers from school board B, 48 of whom completed their induction in 2004/2005 while 50 beginning teachers did so in 2005/2006. Phase II of the analysis materialized from the Phase I findings. Voluntary participants were recruited through the respective school board teacher induction co-coordinators using the following criteria: zero years of professional licensed teaching experience; committed to their board of education's induction program; responsible for a teaching assignment in any of grades 1 to 8; paired with a mentor; satisfied the researcher's intent to have representation from the three elementary school divisions (primary, junior, and intermediate); and satisfied the researcher's intent to have representation from schools in varying socioeconomic communities.

The study's central research question determined the direction of the analysis; namely, what conceptual observations and understandings do three cohorts of beginning teachers derive from their participation in exemplary induction programs purposely selected for their comprehensive services as identified in the research literature?

Both school boards A and B offered provincially recognized comprehensive induction programs that addressed the components discussed in the literature, including orientation sessions, a mentoring program, mentor training, in-services, release time, networks with university faculty, and data collection mechanisms to assess the success of these components. The researcher met on numerous occasions with the board personnel responsible for the induction program from each board of education to ensure relative consistency between the two programs in terms of budget allocation and each program's infrastructure and design. Both induction programs adhered to Ministry of Education guidelines for teacher induction, as they did the Ontario College of Teacher's professional standards of practice. Subsequent to these meetings, the researcher was invited to the induction program steering committee meetings where further comparable assessments were made in regards to vision statements, goals and rationale, delivery components, resource allocation, and common release time for mentors and protégés from classroom responsibilities. The researcher also met with and visited the schools of three principals from each board of education who had the greatest number of protégés employed in their schools to garner a sense of how the induction services were being manifested.

Methodological Triangulation

The study employed a qualitative research design with triangulation to examine the induction experiences of 173 beginning teachers from two school boards in Ontario, Canada during the 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 school years. Triangulation, as Camburn and Barnes (2004) explain, assists in interpreting significant differences that emerge in different kinds of data. Triangulation for the purpose of this research blended data that were collected using varying instruments (see Smaling, 1987, in Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002). Each instrument entailed its own specific concentration and contributed to various domains of beginning teachers' reflections. The emerging data were related on a conceptual level since the various sets of data were considered holistically to produce an inclusive image of beginning teachers' experiences.

In Phase I, the study's triangulation included learning logs and two indicator statements developed from a previous study (Cherubini, 2006). The logs included beginning teachers' monthly written entries of a

significant learning experience and represented their methodical thoughts as they evolved throughout the 10-month school year. The indicator statement responses were collected at the conclusion of the 2004/2005 school year, thereby embedding a factor of time triangulation (see Figure 1).
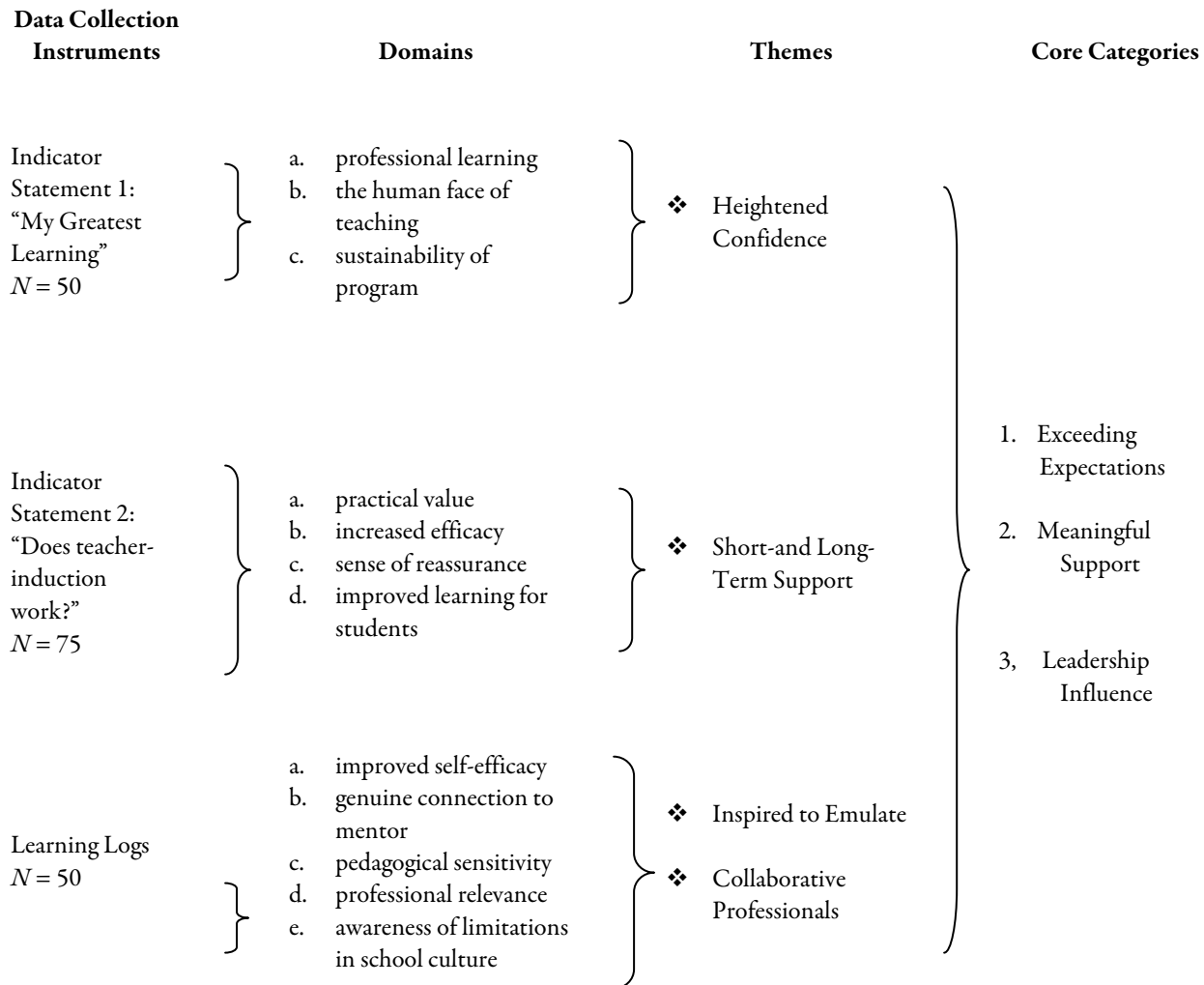
Data Collection Instruments	Domains	Themes	Core Categories
Indicator Statement 1: "My Greatest Learning" $N = 50$	a. professional learning b. the human face of teaching c. sustainability of program	❖ Heightened Confidence	
Indicator Statement 2: "Does teacher-induction work?" $N = 75$	a. practical value b. increased efficacy c. sense of reassurance d. improved learning for students	❖ Short-and Long-Term Support	1. Exceeding Expectations 2. Meaningful Support 3, Leadership Influence
Learning Logs $N = 50$	a. improved self-efficacy b. genuine connection to mentor c. pedagogical sensitivity d. professional relevance e. awareness of limitations in school culture	❖ Inspired to Emulate ❖ Collaborative Professionals	

Figure 1. The evolution of domains, themes, and core categories as they emerged from Phase I of the study.

The findings that emerged from Phase I were applied to a population of beginning teachers involved in an equivalent provincially recognized induction program. The decision to collect data on the same phenomena at two different sites accounted for space triangulation. The data collected from the logs and indicator statements were analyzed, related to each other, and combined (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to develop a comprehensive view of beginning teachers' induction experiences. A qualitative anonymous survey was developed for Phase II of the study as an extension of the findings from Phase I. The survey consisted of three key performance indicator statements that were distributed to the two cohorts of beginning teachers who completed school board B's induction program (see Figure 2).
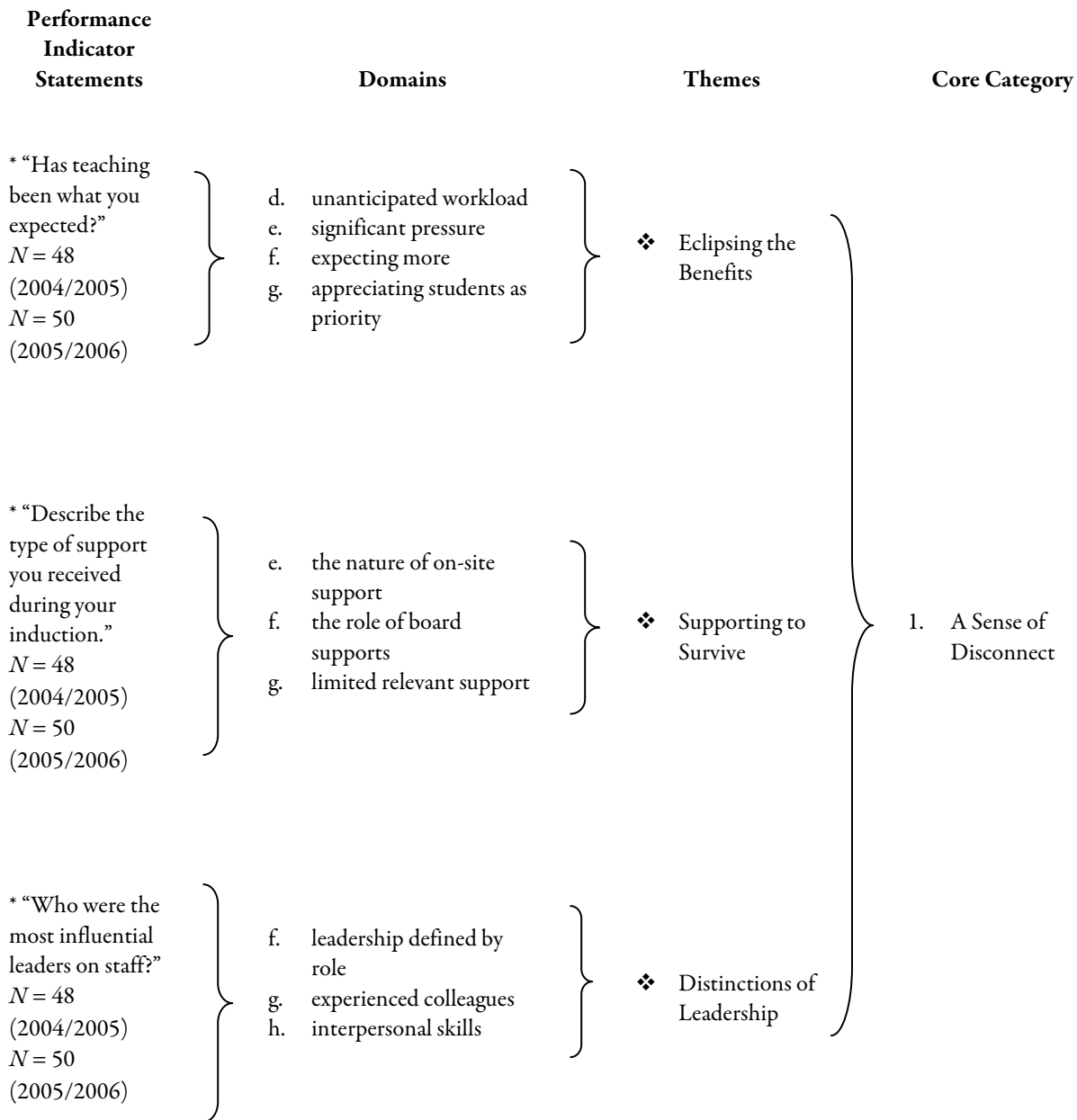
Performance Indicator Statements	Domains	Themes	Core Category
* "Has teaching been what you expected?" *N* = 48 (2004/2005) *N* = 50 (2005/2006)	d. unanticipated workload e. significant pressure f. expecting more g. appreciating students as priority	❖ Eclipsing the Benefits	
* "Describe the type of support you received during your induction." *N* = 48 (2004/2005) *N* = 50 (2005/2006)	e. the nature of on-site support f. the role of board supports g. limited relevant support	❖ Supporting to Survive	1. A Sense of Disconnect
* "Who were the most influential leaders on staff?" *N* = 48 (2004/2005) *N* = 50 (2005/2006)	f. leadership defined by role g. experienced colleagues h. interpersonal skills	❖ Distinctions of Leadership	

Figure 2. The evolution of domains, themes, and core categories as they emerged from Phase II of the study.

Investigator and analysis triangulation was also factored to increase trustworthiness measures. A second researcher and experienced scholar in qualitative research not involved in the project agreed to analyze the data through this inductive process. Qualitative analytical modes of domain analysis (Spradley, 1979; Spradley & McCurdy, 1988) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were systematically used during each phase of the research project. To begin, both researchers independently coded the transcripts from the learning logs by engaging in a line-by-line investigation of domains relevant to the expressed meaning. Researchers tracked their conceptual thinking in memos for each analysis of the three sets of data during Phase I. At the conclusion of

Phase I, the researchers considered relationships from each set of data, then among and between domains. Subsequent domain analysis was completed independently, with each researcher identifying a set of emergent themes grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Based on a consensus-building process, common themes were identified, various discrepancies accounted for, and previous data revisited (Glaser, 1978, 1992). The cross-site data analysis from Phase II was also developed within the parameters of this design to identify the points of comparison and significant categorical contrasts.

Results

Phase I:

A domain and constant comparison analyses saturated the respective properties and four major themes (as identified in Figure 1) into three core categories: exceeding expectations, meaningful support, and leadership influence.

Induction Services as Exceeding Beginning Teachers' Expectations

Implicit in all of the data entries was beginning teachers' recognition that the induction program was as much responsive to their tactical needs in the classroom as it was to the multiplicity of their steep learning curve in the larger context of the school community. Common in a majority of responses were beginning teacher testimonials of "the tremendous amount learned" during the induction year. Participants described how they thrived in professional atmospheres that "sponsored learning and experimenting with new ideas." Beginning teachers reported that their confidence emanated from what one individual called "reflections on teaching and dealing with the big picture of schooling outside the classroom walls." Although statements describing the challenges associated with teaching were not rare, they were consistently couched in rhetoric that suggested teachers' proficiencies to mediate their experiences described as "confidence in both our professional and personal life." Another participant explained that the program quelled the anxiety she had upon entering the profession: "I'm not nearly as anxious of the challenges." Others wrote that "participation in this program has affirmed that I am competent in what I do" and "now I feel like this profession is actually manageable and enjoyable."

Beginning Teachers' Appreciation of Meaningful Support

Emerging from the data sources was an understanding that support was readily available for the functional demands of the job, but more significantly, that the induction program in board A afforded beginning teachers the opportunity to author their own professional development. Participants were heartened by a program that recognized that though all beginning teachers experience trying circumstances, they bring a myriad of diverse capacities to address these. Consistent in the thematic findings was the notion that the board and school cultures were making a long-term investment in beginning teachers' careers by providing a professional development service that encouraged and practiced collaboration among all staff.

Characteristic of teachers' reflections was this individual's response to the induction program: "It allowed me to look ahead at future goals as I begin to build my career." Another suggested, "It makes you want to stay." Particularly noteworthy was this description of the board's "investment into producing committed educators who value our development." Teachers reported that the structured release time with their mentor provided opportunities to address issues that they determined to be priority, and thus, "had a positive impact on the students since we could better their time in school." It was obvious through their learning logs that they

appreciated structuring meetings and scripting agendas with their mentor according to their "customized needs." Though they did not deny the stress of the job as the school year progressed, typical of participants' responses was this one that reported that induction program providers "gave us human faces and a soft place to land when we fell."

Beginning Teachers' Recognition of Teacher-Leadership

The final category represented beginning teachers' reflections regarding teacher-leaders' influence. Beginning teachers expressed a desire to emulate those leading educators who furthered their own learning. Participants were reflective of the capacities of teacher leaders to account for students' diverse learning and personal needs. Participants perceived these capacities as demonstrations of leadership, as they did teacher leaders' recognition of beginning teachers' professional input in divisional and school-related initiatives.

 Participants reported that the opportunities to "design" their professional development afforded them the time to consult with educators who positively influenced student learning. They described these opportunities as resulting in "more confidence," "feeling more comfortable in my role," and "affirming that I'm on the right track." This beginning teacher aptly summarizes the experiences as "gaining excellent insight because every time I visit with these people, I come away with ideas to use in my classroom." Participants expressed that conferencing with teacher leaders resulted in "way more than just understanding when to check the IEP [Individual Education Plan on students' report card] box. I have a better understanding of how I can reach kids and how they learn." This teacher's reflection on her networking with teacher leaders was indicative of many others: "We discussed specific student-learning issues and my behavior management in class. These teachers inspire me."

Further, beginning teachers unanimously reported feeling treated like professionals throughout the induction program. This participant's entry was indicative of others: "It's good to know that they [induction providers] respected my input and were not just looking at me as a person occupying a classroom." Beginning teachers felt rejuvenated by experienced colleagues who had "a supreme level of commitment to children." The teacher leaders who inspired beginning teachers' professional growth "accepted" and "valued" their voices as teachers, regardless of their inexperience.

Especially significant were participants' reflections upon teacher leaders who modeled the importance of advocating for marginalized students. One participant reflected on the extent to which a teacher leader invested her attention on certain students: "I can see how important it is that I stick up for these kids who don't fit in." Typical of others, this beginning teacher garnered an appreciation for teacher leaders' invested commitment which positively influences students' lives. The participant reflected, "I try to turn these students around. If it's not going to be me, then whom?" Beginning teachers also reflected on those teacher leaders who took time to genuinely understand the background of their students. As a result, participants cultivated a greater understanding of their obligation to "really get to know the history of these students." One beginning teacher shared his appreciation of teacher leaders who brought perspective to their work. He noted how these teachers assisted misunderstood students in subtle ways that made a profound difference in their lives. Following their lead, he too experienced a heightened self-efficacy as a teacher and expressed this sentiment: "I go home feeling that I have accomplished something powerful and that I have had an influence in the world."

Phase II:

The core category that saturated the respective domains and three central themes (as identified in Figure 2) from the extensive body of data for Phase II of the study was a sense of disconnect. The domain and constant comparison analyses employed in phase I was also implemented during this phase of the research.

Disconnect Between In-services and Classroom Practice

Interspersed throughout the written responses was participants' appreciation for the assistance they received from induction program providers, administrators, mentors, and colleagues with the job of teaching. The induction program faltered, according to participants, in aligning their pedagogical and professional needs with board and school in-services. In short, there was a disconnect between the professional development they needed and the in-services that were delivered. The insignificant relationship between these two realities contributed to participants' reporting that though support was offered, it was a rather fragmented support model.

Participants' perceived that the stress of teaching when combined with what they deemed to be unrelated induction workshops often eclipsed feelings of fulfillment. Participants typically admitted that "the workload has been far greater than expected," and the job of teaching "was even more challenging than I thought." More than the clerical and time demands, however, was the overwhelming notion of the unanticipated "constant pressure from parents," "feeling disrespected as a professional," and "being told by my principal to cover all my bases with parents." Characteristic of many responses was the following: "I expected more synchronization of activities and staff development across the board." Beginning teachers candidly admitted that generic induction in-services often lost relevancy in light of their particular needs. As one individual stated, "it was a huge adjustment just translating what they [induction facilitators] said so that it meant something to me. On top of everything else, I wasn't expecting to do this." Participants reported that while there was "no shortage of training during the program," there existed a lack of meaningful support since colleagues and administrators "expected us to fulfill all the roles of a teacher with 10 years experience with little consideration of our novice status." In-services were described as "rehashing what we already know" and not delivering the "things that could help the students in my classroom." One teacher wrote on behalf of others in stating, "the support from the program didn't give us what we needed to be effective teachers. I now know what they mean by surviving in teaching." As one participant responded, "there is too much pressure to allow much pleasure from the job."

Although the in-services were deemed to be too prescriptive, participants readily credited grade- and division-level teachers with "being helpful when I needed it most" and in sharing "last minute resources." In each instance when mentors and administrators were cited, participants expressed how "beneficial" their guidance was and the "wonderful relationships" that developed. In the majority of cases, however, this support was informal and independent of the induction program. Beginning teachers recognized the positive contributions administrators and mentors made in terms of exercising "encouragement," "expressing a vested interest in our development," "readily offering advice," and "having a presence in the school." More noteworthy were the references to teacher colleagues as being the most influential leaders in the school community. Participants distinguished teacher leaders as those who "get it," and have "figured it out"; namely, teachers perceived as "confident in their abilities," and "nonjudgmental" of other colleagues." Participants wrote that teacher leaders distinguished themselves as "extremely professional" and "embodied a belief in student success."

Teacher leaders modeled a genuine respect for student diversity and were recognized by participants as having "a kind of spirit."

Discussion

This study examined the significant conceptual differences of beginning teachers' responses to induction. The participants in board A conceptualized their skill development as first-year teachers on a continuum of learning. Participants in board B implied that the delivery of their induction program addressed matters of their professional survival. Given this concentration on teacher retention, the perception existed that the board B induction program was a surface approach to addressing generic needs.

Another overriding impression was that participants in board A felt treated like professionals being inducted into a specialized community. Beginning teachers perceived induction providers, school administrators, board personnel, and mentors as sensitive and responsive to their teaching and learning conditions (Kardos, Moore-Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). The extensive networking possibilities were not perceived as frivolous social opportunities but as legitimate means for professional development Conversely, the beginning teachers from board B felt that induction services framed procedures as "knowing what is best for you" to justify generic workshops for all new teachers regardless of their individual proficiencies.

The respective findings also suggest that a measure of success for teacher induction is instilling a professional trust in beginning teachers that they are capable of initiating and self-directing their professional development. Beginning teachers from board A could mediate their own experiences and not conform to a prescript agenda. Mentors and induction providers supported beginning teachers' pedagogical inquiry y by addressing the unique circumstances of their classrooms. The mentors serviced a collaborative, supporting role and empowered beginning teachers to "tailor [their] own plan" of individual growth by being acutely attentive to their voices. The dialogue between protégé, mentor, and colleague was one of shared power and cooperation (Monkkonen, 2002). While mentors were the prime network contacts for protégés, the mentor was not perceived as a solution-provider but rather as a support for beginning teachers' personal service toward professional growth. In this paradigm, *induction* is defined by the beginning teachers themselves as enabling individual professional learning and development within a community of support. This definition highlights the importance of creating induction services related to beginning teachers' needs in order to improve teaching skills. This definition of *induction* connects teachers' needs and strengths and relates both to the goal of improving student achievement.

The most positive outcomes of beginning teachers' induction experiences resulted when they assumed the responsibility to execute professional development initiatives that suited their needs. It appeared a natural transition for beginning teachers to take the learning gleaned from these opportunities and channel it into the classroom. As this individual from Phase I wrote, effectively capturing the defining conceptual force of enabling beginning teachers within a community of professional support: "I have learned this year that I can do it. That it is okay not to know everything....This discovery has kept me in the profession this year." The findings from this study suggest a more fluent transition from the coping strategies employed by beginning teachers, particularly in the first 8 weeks of the job (Moir, 1999), to fostering positive responses from their contributions. Beginning teachers employed numerous positive value-laden statements when their individual learning and subsequent contributions as professional educators were validated in the classroom and school community. In these instances, beginning teachers felt valued for their input and better equipped to, as this participant concluded, "provide an optimal learning environment for my students."

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be drawn from this study to further research and practice to improve induction programs for beginning teachers. First, this study needs to be replicated. The samples used in the study involved beginning teachers from Ontario—a province located in a central geographical region in Canada. Although the data represented a significant number of 3 different beginning teacher cohorts from various schools, the results may not be generalized to other beginning teachers. The study did not account for individual teacher disposition and personality. Given the range and inconsistencies of teacher induction programs on a provincial, national, and international basis, additional comparative studies may be warranted.

Second, induction practices should acclimatize beginning teachers' sensitivity towards communities of teacher leaders; that is, facilitate opportunities for protégés to model leadership capacities that have direct influences on teaching and learning. The board B beginning teachers felt that induction services emphasized the rank of the educational hierarchy and promoted a fabricated discernment for their well-being. Participants felt disarticulated in an atmosphere of contrived social interaction. They described feeling perceived by induction providers, administrators, and experienced teachers as dependent upon "the system" to successfully negotiate the trials of the first year of teaching. Data from the present study found that beginning teachers who are provided opportunities to network with teacher leaders feel validated to exercise their own leadership influence. Beginning teachers felt affiliated to colleagues, whom they referred to as "real leaders in the school," who were motivated to augment their professional learning and establish a sense of communicative equality across the lines of professional relationships.

The final recommendation from this study is for induction providers to define induction practices as enabling personally relevant professional development for beginning teachers while embracing leadership capacities that pervade all sectors of the school organization.

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