What School Leaders and Teacher Mentors Can Do To Support Teachers for Social Equity

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Abstract The narratives revealed varied levels of support for teacher development across schools and different degrees of teacher autonomy for making instructional decisions. This chapter addresses what school leaders and teacher mentors can do to support teachers' instructional capacities and help them grow as educators for social justice. School leaders can support teacher growth by prompting teachers' self-reflection and working to foster teachers' professional growth. Teacher mentors can model instructional practices, provide in-class coaching, ask teachers questions that prompt self-reflection, and raise teachers' consciousness about social equity. Professional learning communities and teacher inquiry groups offer additional support for growth. Leslie Reich shares some insights from her own experiences working with school leaders in three different schools and how leaders can best support early career teachers.

Keywords Inquiry groups · Professional learning communities · School leaders · Teacher mentors

1 Introduction

We draw from the teacher narratives and the professional literature to discuss the kinds of support that new teachers need to thrive in underserved schools and continue to develop as social equity teachers. As previously discussed, high rates of teacher attrition in underserved communities contribute to the ongoing cycle of inexperienced teachers serving students in high-poverty communities (Ingersoll

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2003). In many schools, new teachers are often left to "sink or swim" and given very little support for curriculum and lesson planning (Ingersoll 2012). Unless early career teachers are supported and treated like the professionals they are, many will leave their schools to find teaching positions elsewhere—or they will leave the profession altogether, perpetuating the cycle of inexperienced teachers in underserved classrooms (Grissom 2011). This is an issue of educational equity and one that experienced teachers and educational leaders have a role in changing. In this chapter, we discuss what school leaders and teacher mentors can do to help new teachers sustain their commitment to urban teaching and grow as educators for social justice.

Two themes surfaced in the narratives that inform a discussion about teacher support in schools: (1) the varied levels of support for teacher development and inquiry and, (2) the different degrees of autonomy given to teachers to make instructional decisions. After highlighting these areas, we will look at the recommendations for supporting early career teachers in schools. At the end of the chapter, Leslie shares some insights from her own experiences working with school leaders in three different schools and how leaders can best support early career teachers. Let us briefly review how the different school environments influenced the teachers in this book.

The narratives indicate that the five teachers needed different levels of support when they first entered their classrooms. TFA corps members Leslie and Tracie needed to know about assessment and instruction and how to meet the diverse literacy needs of their students. Megan focused on needing to learn more about differentiating literacy instruction and, specifically, how to organize a guided reading block to optimize her students' literacy growth. Clare's professional needs focused on creating balanced and culturally responsive instruction. From these descriptions, teachers needed help in three distinct areas: (1) assessment and instruction in literacy, (2) matching instruction to students' diverse literacy needs, and (3) designing balanced and culturally responsive instruction. We also recognize a role for school leaders and teacher mentors to guide teachers toward caring with political clarity, even though we recognize this goal is not often prioritized in schools. Teachers' ability to scrutinize their own race- and class-based assumptions about meritocracy and achievement and understand the historical and political circumstances affecting their students' lives is vital for engaging in the kinds of authentic relationships with students that are needed to support their learning (Roberts 2010; Rolon-Dow 2005; Whipp 2014).

Before we discuss ways that school leaders and teacher mentors can support teachers, let us review the kinds of support that our teachers received in their schools. One source of learning support came from daily access to a mentor or colleague. Clare was assigned a Spanish-speaking co-teacher who mediated communication between her, her students, and their caregivers. Likewise, Rachael collaborated with a partner-teacher who was credentialed in English as a Second Language. Clare and Rachael discussed the benefits of having immediate access to these co-teachers of whom they could ask questions, weigh possible instructional

options, and gain insights and perspectives about specific children. This type of support was provided to only two of the five teachers.

The other teachers wrote about accessing various support options in and beyond their schools. Leslie indicated that she asked to prepare her students for tests but was not given much assistance with finding ways to raise their scores. Instead, she reached out to her TFA colleagues when she needed help serving the diverse literacy abilities of her students. Megan did not mention any in-class help but discussed attending professional development workshops provided through her school district. Tracie indicated that her school mentored first- and second-year teachers but did not go into detail about what she extracted from this type of support. In addition to these experiences, the teachers discussed independent efforts to learn about teaching through attending university workshops (Rachael) or by accessing various professional texts (Leslie, Megan, Tracie).

Rachael, Clare, and Leslie were given a great deal of flexibility to teach in ways they believed would enhance their students' literacy achievement. Megan and Tracie, however, were more restricted in their decisions about what and how to teach. Both felt their students' learning was compromised because they had to devote significant amounts of time to test preparation and administering tests. At the time these teachers wrote their narratives, adequate yearly progress guidelines under NCLB mandated total school restructuring for failing schools. Both teachers felt that if they did not produce high scores, they might lose their teaching jobs if their schools were reconstituted. This lingering threat was a continuing source of tension for these teachers.

As stated in the previous chapter, teaching conditions within schools can determine new teachers' ability to enact social justice goals; those who feel scrutinized or constantly under pressure to produce high test scores are less apt to take the risks they need to teach in ways that are consistent with culturally sustaining, social equity practices (Philpott and Dagenais 2012). Also, teachers may perceive that district-approved pre-published materials carry a certain value and moral authority (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), and so their willingness to augment these materials to teach in culturally sustaining or critical ways is reduced. On the other hand, those with strong equity orientations will find ways to resist practices that run counter to their beliefs about teaching. As we discovered with Megan and Tracie, however, resisting or changing mandated practices can be stressful and disheartening.

Standardized testing is not going to go away anytime soon. Even though many states are reevaluating the No Child Left Behind federal law that has driven the standardized testing movement over the last decade, Race to the Top also emphasizes the use of tests as a condition for receiving federal education funds and, increasingly, as a tool to evaluate teacher performance. At the same time, states are adopting the Common Core State Standards that come with their own standardized assessments. Most school leaders today, and particularly those in large, urban school districts, are pressured to comply with federal and state policies that require standardized testing.

Teachers' careers, and those of their school leaders, are made more tenuous when students fail to show academic progress on standardized tests. High-stakes tests result in narrowing the curriculum and prescribing what and how teachers should teach (Ravitch 2013; Wright 2002). Within many of these environments, teachers are either rewarded for complying with school-mandated policies and practices or punished when they resist or alter them. Discounting teachers' professional knowledge can be discouraging for new teachers who are starting to figure out what really works with their students. They are likely to feel frustrated when they are expected teach in ways that are so far afield from their emerging knowledge of how their students learn best. They may blame themselves and their own lack of experience, rather than flawed policies, for their failure to engage students while using mandated practices that do not match students' needs. Or they may want to do something about the disjuncture between school policy and their own beliefs but do not know where to turn. Clearly, new teachers need systems for dealing with the negative effects of high-stakes testing and prescriptive teaching.

Teachers need different levels of support in learning how to teach, and they need to be trusted to make instructional decisions based on their knowledge of students. School leaders and teacher mentors should provide flexible systems of support that consider each teacher's needs. Teachers also need support to develop as critical caring social equity educators. Next we discuss the different roles school leaders and teacher mentors can take to support teachers in these areas.

2 The Role of School Leaders

Despite the complexities of managing schools today and the diversity of background experiences that new teachers bring to schools, school leaders can do much to support them and their growth as social-justice educators (Borman and Dowling 2008; Brown and Wynn 2009; Grissom 2011). As Grissom states:

> The effectiveness of the school principal is found to be an especially important component of teacher working conditions; average teacher ratings of principal effectiveness are strong predictors of teacher job satisfaction and one-year turnover probability in the average school. Moreover, these correlations are even stronger in schools with large numbers of disadvantaged students that traditionally have faced greater staffing challenges (p. 2576).

A study of 800 U.S. teachers who were asked to describe the characteristics of principals who enhanced their instruction revealed two themes of effective instructional leadership: communicating with teachers in ways that prompt self-reflection and promoting their professional growth (Blase and Blase 2000). The study found that teachers valued dialogue with principals that encouraged them to think critically about their practices. They identified effective school leaders as those who gave suggestions and feedback, modeled practices, used inquiry, solicited advice and opinions, and gave praise. In the area of promoting professional growth, principals used strategies such as emphasizing the study of teaching and

learning, supporting collaboration about learning, developing coaching relationships, and encouraging classroom inquiry.

Frequent and supportive communication with new teachers is also associated with their retention in urban schools (Brown and Wynn 2009). Principals who retain new teachers at higher rates than their peers tend to understand the issues affecting these professionals and are aware of how the teachers are impacted. They also tend to employ proactive (instead of reactive) approaches to support new teachers and apply high standards for their own and others' professional growth.

As indicated in the narratives, one of the major issues affecting two of the teachers was high-stakes testing and the imposition of rigid curricula that discounted their professional knowledge. Understanding that school leaders are also constrained by these policies, an important stance would be to unite with teachers to reduce the threat imposed by standardized tests. The focus should be on meeting curriculum goals. By becoming allies with teachers in defense of sound teaching, both school leaders and teachers will need to read the political landscape and become aware of the professional risks associated with resisting scripted programs (Achinstein and Ogawa 2006).

School leaders, however, cannot be the only professionals supporting early-career teachers. They must also rely on teacher mentors—those who have developed expertise in teaching and who are invested in teacher growth. Serving as teacher-coaches or professional-development leaders, these more experienced teachers can be an invaluable resource to new teachers.

3 The Role of Teacher Mentors

The learning curve for new teachers in urban schools is great. There is much to know about different teaching methods, differentiating instruction around the diverse needs of students, and teaching for social equity. Having regular access to an experienced mentor, or instructional coach, can be a lifeline to beginning teachers who are struggling to meet their day-to-day responsibilities. Much of the literature on teacher mentoring and coaching focuses on supporting teachers' ability to enact research-based practices in specific content areas and differentiating instruction (Allison and Reeves 2011; Carrera 2010; Coy 2004; Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey 2012). Coaches can support teachers by modeling instructional practices, observing teachers and providing feedback, asking questions that elicit teacher reflection, and working with teachers to plan curriculum and select strategies with students' learning needs in mind. An important dimension of coaching is helping teachers explore the thinking behind their practices by asking them non-judgmental questions that prompt self-reflection, as in the cognitive coaching model (Costa and Garmston 2002). We recommend that readers look at this extensive literature to explore teacher mentoring to improve instructional practices. Our focus is on teacher mentoring to enhance teachers' understandings about social equity.

Equity-focused mentoring must involve helping new teachers learn about research-based practices and tailoring them to students' individual needs. In addition equity-oriented mentors can also help teachers confront deficit-based assumptions about students' capacities, and assist their inquiries about the cultural assets of students, the cultural wealth of communities, and the social and structural factors that impact students (Achinstein and Athanases 2005). Mentors work to raise teachers' consciousness about equitable access to learning by focusing attention on students' instructional experiences—inquiring about who is being left out and who is benefiting from instruction. This kind of support is needed to help teachers move beyond attending to their own performance to focusing on individual learners and their needs within particular sociocultural settings.

Effective mentor-coaches have themselves been highly successful teachers who are committed to social equity work (Achinstein and Athanases 2005). These professionals understand how adults learn and can nudge teachers toward social equity stances through respectful and patient dialogues rather than lectures. Further, mentors' ability to address both student and teacher learning simultaneously requires a complex knowledge base. In order to effectively support beginning teachers, mentors need access to theories, case studies, practice videos, and opportunities to reflect on their mentoring work with novice teachers. They also need adequate recognition and compensation for their mentoring roles, requiring investments by schools and districts (Stansbury and Zimmerman 2000). In addition to high-quality mentoring and access to school leaders, beginning teachers also need common planning time with colleagues and intensive professional development. This package of supports constitutes "comprehensive induction" for beginning teachers (Ingersoll and Strong 2011). The literature also recommends teacher access to professional learning communities, a topic we will explore next.

Professional learning communities (PLCs), sometimes referred to as inquiry groups, teacher learning groups, or teacher research groups, offers another source of support for new teachers. PLCs position teachers as theorizers and generators of knowledge, based on critical and systematic inquiries of their own teaching practices and their impact on student learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993). In these mentoring networks, teachers inquire about their teaching, share and produce knowledge, engage in collaborative planning, and question school policies and practices in safe and supportive environments (Philpott and Dagenais 2012; Riley 2015; Ritchie 2012; Timmons 2007). These professional learning communities are well established in the research literature and connected with sustaining teachers' ability to do social-justice work in schools.

Riley (2015) discusses how a group of secondary teachers supported each other by sharing their visions of literacy and teaching, establishing a focus for inquiring about their own practices, discussing ways to enact critical literacy practices, and sharing the challenges they faced when the policies and practices in their schools did not align with their visions. The study group was a safe venue for strategizing how to negotiate with administrators about school policies so they could teach in ways that aligned with their visions of critical literacy practice. This work was done

among teachers of varied experience levels, but these arrangements can be an important resource for helping new teachers grow as critical educators.

Picower (2011a, b) focuses on how inquiry groups help new teachers develop social-justice orientations. She explored how a social-justice critical-inquiry group (CIP) supported the development of new first- and second-year teachers who graduated from a program centered on social justice education. These teachers were invited to participate in biweekly campus-based meetings that were primarily teacher-designed and -facilitated. The meetings were guided by certain norms, such as the expectations that all members participate, the appreciation for diverse points of view, the allowance for tension during group conversations, and the acceptance that some issues would remain unresolved. The teachers met in critical-friends trios to discuss the issues they faced in their classrooms and acknowledged each other's contributions. They also engaged in activities related to social justice with members of the whole group. These included:

> Responding to readings, developing curriculum on social justice topics (child labor, Iraq war, historical racism, genocide), sharing and troubleshooting enacted curriculum, examining student work to see how students were understanding themes of social justice, researching and learning about specific topics they identified as knowledge gaps in their own learning (Malcolm X, service learning), listening to guest speakers on social justice pedagogy, preparing for presentations on their work, creating blogs of their projects, and more.

Picower found that the group helped teachers in three ways. First, it provided models of social-justice teaching that inspired and motivated the less-experienced teachers: "The more experienced teachers gave a sense of what was coming next and their projects and their projects helped newer members understand how to get started, and sparked new ideas for everyone. Additionally, listening to each other's experiences helped them all to better analyze their own contexts" (p. 18). Second, the CIP project improved teachers' ability to teach for social justice. Often, teachers appropriated the norms they used in their group meetings, such as accepting the tension that often surfaces when speaking about social justice issues, and they applied these norms to their own classroom practices. And because participants shared curriculum ideas, they were able to implement social justice-oriented projects that may have been disregarded without such group support. Third, Picower found that teachers' participation as group facilitators helped them develop leadership and mentoring abilities.

One implication of this research is the need to rethink the usual professional development model of having "experts" come into schools a few times each year to dictate to teachers what they should be doing in their classrooms. Picower indicated that "true teacher development requires long-term and intense investments in the relationships and well-being of aspiring social justice educators" (p. 23). This is especially necessary for teachers whose social-justice orientations are challenged by the presence of high-stakes testing and mandated curricula. Such groups offer teachers support to build their social-justice visions and generate strategies for negotiating prescribed curricula and mitigating the negative effects of high-stakes testing (Picower 2011b).

Many teacher-led inquiry groups that support teacher learning are formed outside of schools. In Philadelphia, for instance, the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (TLC) and the Philadelphia Writing Project (PhilWP) are two urban-based teacher collaborative networks that support teacher growth in understanding students' literacy capacities and learning needs. Teachers in the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative use oral inquiry processes, based on Carini's (2001) work at the Prospect School in Vermont, to study children's work in the context of their classroom and school lives. Common to these groups is the inquiry stance of teachers becoming students of their own students in ways that challenge existing assumptions about teaching and research on teaching (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009).

The availability of in-class mentoring and school-based professional learning communities is dependent on school leaders who are invested in teacher development and who actively discuss, support, and/or organize these opportunities. This often requires school leaders who have themselves developed critical, social equity orientations and who are deeply invested in creating transformative schools.

Throughout this book we have made explicit the connections between published research findings and the lives of teachers through the use of teacher narratives. Again, we turn to the narrative form to illustrate what some of these findings look like in the authentic contexts of urban schools. We share Leslie's perspectives of school leadership and teacher mentoring based on her work in three different schools. In particular, she focuses on her own professional growth in her most recent school, as a consequence of excellent coaching and her own participation in a teacher inquiry group.

4 Leslie's Reflections on the Significance of School Leaders and Teacher Mentors

As a veteran teacher of eight years, Leslie reflects on the different kinds of support she has received from both principals and coaches. Her greatest professional gains have come from her current principal and coach. Their leadership styles complement what has been presented in the research literature on effective school leaders for new teachers in underserved communities, especially those who aspire to create social justice educators.

4.1 Establishing Touch Points

School leaders have the burden and the privilege of setting a first-year teacher up for a lifetime of healthy mindsets around instruction, children, professionalism, hard work, and growth. Having taught in three different contexts in three different

geographic regions, I have experienced a variety of school leadership styles, some more effective and inspiring than others. School leaders play the crucial role of largely determining what type of year a first-time teacher will experience. Will it be a year of more tears or more smiles? Will it be stressful but also rewarding? Will it be based on fear or on confidence? Will it inspire a teacher to want to stay in the classroom? From my perspective as a teacher, the best school leaders I have worked with regularly engage in certain practices that inspire and support me and play instrumental roles in my development as an educator: they allow access to themselves and maintain an open-door policy, provide honest and supportive feedback, conduct tons of classroom observations, encourage mentoring and networking, and help new teachers develop systems.

I have found that the level of access a teacher has to his/her school leaders and the quality of that access determines how much trust that teacher will develop in that leadership—and thus in the school and him/herself at large—and informs that teacher's overall happiness and likelihood of wanting to remain at the school long-term. New teachers have a thousand questions, a thousand concerns, a thousand fears, and a thousand unforeseen challenges to confront. In my experience, the best way to build this trust is to increase the number of "touch points" between leadership and new staff that are honest, supportive, and mutually respectful.

The amount of access I have had to my school leadership impacts how hard I want to work and how long I envision myself working at the school. At one of the schools I taught in, I felt completely isolated from my school's leadership. My principal inaccurately pronounced my name (on the few occasions he even addressed me by name) and introduced me to a visitor as teaching a grade and subject I did not teach. He did not know me as a person or as an educator, which prevented me from perceiving him as an ally and as one of the primary individuals responsible for my development as a new teacher and new professional. My principal did not provide inspiration during the most trying months of the year (like in the middle of winter when the sun rises after we're already at school and it gets dark at 4:30 in the afternoon); he did not provide encouragement in the weeks prior to the state exam; he did not compliment me or my students on the insightful work we hung on the walls or upon achieving strong test results. In observing his work habits, he was often the first staff member to leave campus at the end of the day, and he was frequently seen working at his desk instead of in the halls or classrooms. In fact, my final evaluation at the end of my first year focused on my perfect attendance and good relationship with a particular colleague. Truthfully, even if he had offered praise for a year well done, I would not have considered his praise to be genuine or meaningful. He and I simply had not had enough "touch points" for me to trust that his words were well intentioned or evidence-based. Although I found my own sources of inspiration, working for a principal who motivated me to work hard and who assured me of my sense of belonging at his school would have invited me to envision a longer career at his school.

By comparison, the principal of the school where I now teach in New York City sends weekly emails to inspire us, especially in the most grueling times of the year. He schedules one-on-one check-ins with every staff member multiple times a year

to ensure that he has a pulse on the goings-on of the school. He delegates the responsibilities that accompany teaching a staff with a wide array of experience to ensure that all staff members get differentiated support. He is frequently one of the last people to leave the building; he can rarely be found at his desk during the school day since he is usually observing, holding meetings, or talking to kids who have been sent out of class. He answers emails within minutes, even on the weekends. He lives and breathes our school's happiness and success. His hard work inspires me to work hard, and he makes me want to work at my school forever.

4.2 Supportive and Socially Conscious Professional Development

Since school leaders are responsible to set an agenda for professional development, it is imperative that teachers feel empowered to proactively communicate with their leaders about what they need to grow as professionals. An open-door policy provides an avenue for teachers to dialogue with their leaders about challenges that have arisen and ideas that could be implemented. I have approached my current principal for advice on innumerable topics, ranging from challenges with particular students to communication with other staff members.

In the fall of 2013, I scheduled a meeting with my principal to discuss an idea about which I'd done some research during the preceding summer: our school did not openly discuss diversity and inclusiveness (D & I), and I believed that doing so needed to become a priority. I presented what I'd learned and made my case. My principal listened to everything I said, but still was unconvinced that D & I should move to the forefront of our school-wide professional-development agenda. I asked him for the benefit of the doubt and offered him excerpts from the reading I'd done over the summer. We scheduled a follow-up appointment. When we returned to the table, my principal relayed to me what he had learned from the readings and became convinced that we needed to prioritize D & I. He carved time into our school's all-staff professional development calendar to run my first session, and after receiving hugely positive feedback, we now incorporate D & I sessions into our regular professional development.

These sessions are typically 90–120 min. I do the bulk of the work with regard to design and execution, with the help of a few other people (vacillates between members of the school leadership team and other teachers). We had one session—"Becoming Active Allies"—that focused on how to respond to students when they say something that is derogatory or ignorant in some way; it involved dozens of scenarios (about race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and cognitive ability) that teachers practiced responding to in groups of three. The most recent three sessions have focused on race. We brainstormed our own stories in racial affinity groups and discussed how those realities manifest themselves in the workplace. Then we discussed some of the micro-aggressions teachers and students commit that send subtle messages about

certain racial groups, and then had a session on affirming student identity. From here, we are hoping to continue discussing race and begin to also include gender.

There is always pre-work ranging from locating articles by experts in the field, to random articles I find online, to videos that would be pertinent. During sessions, there is a huge emphasis on individual reflection, discussion in small groups, and whole-group share-outs. We solicit teacher feedback after each of the sessions. The overwhelming response from the staff is that the sessions have been enormously helpful in teaching them things they didn't know across lines of difference and allowing them the space to explore this incredibly important part of our work. Many staff members have indicated that the D & I sessions are their favorites of the year. I can recall dozens of times when a teacher sees me in the teachers' room or in the hall and relays a story of how they tackled a D & I-related challenge.

My principal's open-door policy allowed me to advocate for the creation of a program that I believed our school desperately needed, and because he and I trusted each other, we worked together to get on the same page and take next steps that we both believed were in the best interest of our students.

The example of an open-door policy can extend from school leaders to teachers and other staff members of a school. Without it, new teachers will face great obstacles in developing themselves as professionals and learning to handle conflict in a calm and respectful way. My first year as a teacher was also my first in the professional world after graduating college. Although I'd grown up in a large family and been involved in numerous activities throughout high school and college that required communicating and working with others, I had never worked in the professional sphere. The staff was largely divided into two camps: those who worked incredibly hard and held themselves accountable to high expectations and those who didn't. Naturally, I fell in with the former group. What I didn't realize, however, was that the two sides did not peacefully coexist; rather, they deeply resented each other. So when I assumed a role on one side, I was exacerbating a staff-wide divide that bred conflict during meetings, gossip after school, and a complete lack of collaboration across grades and content areas. Our principal either failed to notice this unhealthy adult culture or failed to prioritize its reconciliation. The end result was not only an unhealthy work environment for staff members but also an academic environment that did not achieve the results it could have. And the end result on a personal level was that I learned unprofessional ways to communicate with colleagues.

Fortunately, I have not experienced this challenge in my current school, and I have since prioritized professionalism in adult culture. I have learned both by example and by direct instruction how to resolve conflicts with colleagues, how to deescalate contentious discussions, and how to speak up proactively about a difficulty I face with one of my peers. At my current school, entire professional development sessions are devoted to advice on how to communicate with others about sensitive topics. Since engaging in these sessions, I have learned to confront these issues proactively, and my colleagues have done the same. The goal is that there is no gossip, there is no questioning of others' intent, and there is no built-up resentment. We are approaching that ideal.

4.3 Classroom Observations and Supportive Coaching

The idea that staff members should be able to give feedback to one another on a regular basis transfers from the teachers' lounge to the classroom. Great school leaders conduct numerous classroom observations—at least once every two weeks, preferably more—of new teachers. These observations serve multiple purposes: provide feedback for the teacher in terms of academic instruction and cultural feel of the classroom, build teacher skill by engaging in real-time coaching, and keep a pulse on what's "really going on" in classrooms. As a new teacher, I obsess over the particulars of my lesson plans and make sure that the classwork is just right, but how will I know whether my actual instructional delivery is "good"? How would I know whether I'd used every minute effectively and met the needs of every student in the class? I needed someone with a finely tuned instructional eye to watch my class and tell me how to improve.

Since school leaders most often do not teach a class of their own, they can become removed from what it feels like on the "ground level." Classroom observations can mitigate this problem. One afternoon in October when I was teaching in Oakland, my principal received a call from Laurent's mother: the teachers were picking on her son and giving him far too many detentions. My principal spoke to each of Laurent's teachers and observed him in each of his classes to find out what was happening. She found that Laurent's behaviors did, indeed, warrant multiple detentions over the course of a day. The problem, however, was that his teachers were not calling his mom to inform her about the specific behaviors that were eliciting the consequence. As a result, Laurent's mom had access to an incomplete story: Laurent was controlling the narrative. The classroom observations and individual conversations my principal conducted uncovered the truth of what was happening, and all parties were able to work towards a solution.

Naturally, one of the greatest ways to build trust between a school leader and a new teacher is to establish regular check-ins. These consistent appointments provide the space for establishing rapport and allow a new teacher to see that his/her leader is indeed an expert in the field, to understand that his/her leader has the best interest of teachers and students at heart, and to have faith that the leader truly believes that the teacher can lead students to success. At my current school, these meetings are a regular practice for instructional coaches and their mentees. My coach started the school year by issuing a survey that allowed her to learn about my working style, the ways in which I like to receive both critical and positive feedback, successes and failures I have experienced in working with school leadership in the past, and other more personal qualities I would want her to know, like my favorite candy and what I like to do in my free time. To my surprise, she actually took my survey answers seriously and coached me in the way that matched the style in which I like to be coached.

Once this trust started to become established, I went to my instructional coach for every need that arose. On one occasion, I had a difficult time envisioning how I would engage students more in the process of figuring out how to successfully

analyze evidence in a way that proved the overall thesis of the papers they were writing. I knew when students had done a successful job and when they had not, but every time I tried to explain the criteria for success, they wound up merely restating their evidence or taking their inferences too far. My instructional coach suggested that we spend one of our weekly meetings thinking through different ways to teach this skill. We considered a think-aloud so that students would have a model for how to conduct this type of thinking; we entertained the idea of having students give and receive feedback to one another; we brainstormed ways for scholars to examine several examples and non-examples.

We decided on an idea that would remove a significant amount of scaffolding from the lesson, thereby encouraging scholars to do their own thinking about what makes analysis successful. I placed two examples of body paragraphs in front of them. Each paragraph utilized the same assertion and presented the same evidence, but the analysis was different. Neither example was weak, but one was clearly stronger than the other. I asked them to evaluate both, identify the stronger version, and decide what made it stronger. Once they had articulated the answer, I gave them another paragraph, this one with an assertion and evidence, but without any analysis at all. They filled in their own analysis, thinking about what they had previously articulated. The results were strong. I then set them free to work on their own papers; they produced some of the strongest analysis I had seen from them all year. My instruction became more rigorous and clear when I had the benefit of co-planning with my coach.

I once posed a question to the class regarding George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "Why did Orwell choose to portray Trotsky and Stalin as pigs?" A few scholars provided answers that were feasible, but no one really arrived at what I felt was the correct one. I called on a few more kids, but still no one got it. I gave up and told them in frustration, "Pigs have reputations for being dirty and greedy but intelligent in the animal kingdom." After the lesson, my coach led me through a few alternate ways I could have elicited the information without simply giving it away: I could have presented a nonfiction reading about the reputations of various animals, or I could have invited the scholars to collaborate with partners and then cold-called on them to share with the class. For the next lesson in which I asked a question about the author's craft, I was better prepared to keep the rigorous thinking squarely on the shoulders of students, even if they didn't immediately get an answer right.

Occasionally, there are moments while I am at the front of the classroom and a challenge arises that I do not know how to handle. Perhaps I ask a question and zero hands go up. Perhaps a student turns to chat with a neighbor every time I turn around to write on the board. Or maybe a student publically responds to a consequence in a way that is subtly disrespectful. During these times, a new teacher might feel paralyzed: should I give a consequence? Should I wait to address the issue with the student in private? What if my tone is too harsh or too meek? Real-time coaching can help a new educator handle these situations in a way that is authentic. On one occasion during my first year teaching in New York, I asked the class whether George was justified in killing Lenny in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Two students dominated the discussion: Jamya argued that killing was

wrong in every circumstance, while John asserted that Lenny would have died anyway, so it was better for George to be the one to carry it out. The argument seemed great from my perspective: Jamya and John were deliberating over the exact point I wanted them to debate. What I didn't understand was that only two students in the room were actually doing the thinking. What were the other 28 doing? My coach stepped in: "Pause the discussion. Jamya and John have named the two sides of the argument. Everyone, turn and tell your partner who you agree with more and why." While the scholars were discussing, my coach showed me the benefit: now everyone was doing the thinking. When a similar situation arose, I utilized the skill my coach had just demonstrated for me.

The amount of access a new teacher has to his/her school leadership also determines the likelihood of implementing an innovative idea. In the spring of 2012, students in my class were three weeks into a seven-week independent research project. In looking over their work and providing feedback and suggestions for moving forward with their projects, I realized that my scholars fell into three different buckets: those who came across significant research challenges (their topics were too broad or too narrow; they had considerably more learning to do before being able to make sense of the research; they had discovered far more nuances in their ideas than they had anticipated), those who had conducted comprehensive research but who needed advice on how to make sense of all of it in an outline, and those who had already begun outlining and simply needed to keep going. How would I teach a whole-class lesson when my scholars needed such drastically different things from me?

An idea occurred to me that, because of my strong relationship with my instructional coach, I felt comfortable suggesting to her and asking for her feedback. I proposed that I teach the class in stations: teach the third of the class that had made the least progress first while the other two-thirds of the class were working independently, and then teach the other kids after that. The idea would require me to put them in groups and have the groups move around the room holding their laptops. My coach encouraged me to follow through with the differentiated plan and acted as a thought partner on the challenges that would arise. We thought through how we could make the plan run as smoothly as possible, and then she came to the lesson to observe it in action. It was enormously successful. Kids got exactly what they needed from me and thus had a hugely productive class period—all thanks to my coach's openness to innovative ideas.

My principal and coaches do much to ease the negative effects that standardized tests can often have on students. This is because we don't tend to focus on these tests but instead concentrate on achievement in the regular curriculum. About three weeks before the state test, we begin preparing the scholars for it and make them feel pumped and confident that they will do well. Our coaches write us notes telling us how prepared the kids are thanks to our hard work. Most importantly, we are all involved in analyzing data after it comes back. We look at it honestly and critically, analyzing where students need to improve and noticing places where particular kids did well or showed tremendous growth.

4.4 Establishing Systems

From a logistical perspective, great school leaders help new teachers develop systems that increase effectiveness and minimize stress. Teachers of every content at every age will report the enormous number of papers that pass through their hands in a given school year: homework and classwork assignments (both handed in and ready to be given back), exit tickets, hall passes, notes from administrators, notes between students, book check-out forms, notebook paper, lecture notes, text packets, index cards—and those are just the papers that directly involve students. Then there are notes from meetings, from professional development sessions, on curriculum notes from one-off conversations, reminders for later, to-do lists, etc. Schools go through seemingly infinite amounts of paper. New teachers need someone to help them anticipate the physical logistics of keeping track of it all. Since most school leaders have been teachers earlier in their careers, they can share some "tricks of the trade" for approaching this challenge in a way that diminishes anxiety and actually improves performance.

The same goes for computer and email. My Microsoft Word houses dozens of folders: curriculum, staff-wide development, my personal development, taxonomy, scholar work samples, resources, homework, vocabulary, grammar, and all the other files that are for my "outside life"—household and family documents, etc. Email organization is a craft unto itself—folders marked by urgency, sender, and topic are crucial. The principal of my current school believes that keeping track of deadlines and files makes for efficiency and minimizes the stress that naturally accompanies receiving dozens of emails a day. He hosts an optional workshop at the beginning of each year to impart the wisdom of his email organization system to his staff to use at their discretion. Because he feels passionately about organization, I am inspired to do the same, and his color-coded system has saved countless hours of searching through files looking for one particular email.

Organizational systems don't stop simply with electronic and hard-copy papers; I have found that the amount of time I dedicate to working outside of school depends directly on my efficiency and productivity during the school day. As part of their regular check-ins with recent hires, great school leaders will teach new educators how to avoid doing unnecessary work, how to use their prep periods purposefully, and how to set boundaries between work and outside life. Double work can be a regular part of teaching if educators do not develop ways to avoid it. At one time or another in my teaching career, I have (embarrassingly) done the following: I have graded an assignment on the students' papers, recorded the grades on a hard-copy tracker, and then transferred the written grades to my digital gradebook. I have written lesson plans, created classwork from those lesson plans, and printed out a copy of that classwork to fill out a teacher answer key by hand. I have opened a blank document and retyped the heading of my classwork assignments every day. I have called the parent of a student and had to call back with a second message I'd forgotten to include in the first phone call. I have taken notes in the hard copy of a book and then typed those notes into my computer, followed by

condensing them and sending them as an email to a colleague; I have written "thesis does not encompass all of your sub-arguments" by hand on sixty separate papers. In other words, I have done a tremendous amount of unnecessary work. A school leader at my school in Oakland, California, revealed some far superior systems for avoiding this unnecessary work, like condensing my lesson planning into one document and developing codes for giving students feedback on their work. These minute pieces of advice added up to hundreds of saved minutes of work.

I would have benefited greatly from learning from a school leader or veteran teacher how to use my "breaks" more effectively during the school day. As a first-year teacher, my morning classes ended at 10:35, and then I had a break until 11:20. I had one twenty-minute break in the afternoon, an hour-long break before my last class, and another thirty minutes between last period and the end of the school day. At first, I made a long list of all the action items I wanted to accomplish and prioritized them in order of importance and urgency—a system that had worked for me in college. What I often found, however, was that I used my first few prep periods trying to finish one big item having crossed nothing off my to-do list, skipped lunch, then made my copies after school. I would then go home and, even though I'd (mostly) finished one large item on my list, I still had 11 more that needed to get accomplished. By that time, I was exhausted from being on my feet all day without having eaten but forced myself to stay awake until ten, often working during dinner, to finish the items on my list. Then, after seven hours of sleep, I woke up and did the same thing all over again. I told myself I would get all my work done on Saturdays so that I could relax on Sundays, but I actually found that trying to do work after a full work-week was exhausting, and I didn't accomplish enough of what needed to get done, forcing me to complete the leftover work on Sunday. I was exhausted during the week and then had no weekend respite.

With regard to using my preparation periods, the biggest lesson I learned, after many months of stress, was that I had to actually plan what work to accomplish during these times. I figured out that I would grade papers in my early prep periods (so that I wouldn't have to lug papers home), do a little lesson planning in the middle of the day (when I still had enough energy), and then make copies after my last class (a task I could not accomplish at home and that required minimal mental energy). I figured out that attempting work on Saturdays actually made my weekends more stressful, so I started doing no work on Saturdays and saved it for Sunday mornings. I then started to begin each week having felt like I had enjoyed an actual weekend while still accomplishing my workload. School leaders should name these "best practices" for their new staff members, encouraging them to cater these systems to their own needs and working styles, and they should include checking in on new teachers' work-life balance and work effectiveness at their regular meetings.

School leaders play an enormous role in shaping the experiences of a first-year teacher. They know how hard new educators work and how quickly they must grow to meet the demands of their job. If these leaders commit to having enough discussions with their new staff members, observe them in action, and help them grow

as professionals and instructors, they will be able to find plenty of opportunities to give genuine and precise praise. Even as an eighth-year teacher, I am still hard on myself when a lesson doesn't go well, but when I don't see fast enough progress with the kids, it is school leaders who inspire me to keep teaching.

5 Why Leslie's Experience Matters

Leslie's narrative illustrates how school leaders and teacher mentors can shape new teachers' development. After her first two school experiences, she was fortunate to find a school where her principal invited frequent communication, listened to the issues she faced, provided feedback about her practices and ideas, and through his demonstrations of commitment to the school, inspired her to remain in her position. Her words are worth repeating: "*He lives and breathes our school's happiness and success. His hard work inspires me to work hard, and he makes me want to work at my school forever.*" He also provided professional development support to establish positive communication among staff and management systems for increasing efficiency in teaching and organization.

Most notably, this school leader took seriously Leslie's thoughts about diversity and inclusion and welcomed her ideas about launching professional development and group sharing sessions for teachers that aligned with social-justice principles. These sessions allowed teachers to bring new insights and ways of dialoguing about diversity into their classrooms.

We also see effective leadership happening on two other levels in Leslie's narrative: (1) a commitment from the leaders of her school network to utilize coaches as teacher mentors, and (2) strong instructional coaches who tailor their support to the individual needs of teachers. This professional relationship was based on mutual trust, established from the beginning with a very thoughtful survey issued by the coach. These initial trust-building efforts were key to Leslie's invitations to the coach to observe her teaching, and these visits resulted in rich collaborations that strengthened her literacy teaching and deepened students' learning.

Lastly, these school leaders are pragmatic about standardized testing; instead of obsessing over it, they have created a climate where achievement is the focus all year long. They work to raise students' and teachers' confidence levels and invite respectful communication on what the test results indicate and how teachers can respond to raise student achievement.

Leslie's experience exemplifies the central point of this chapter: school-level supports can have a profound effect on new teachers' views about themselves and their future employment plans. Had she received same level of support in her first school as she does in her present school, she may have remained in that school. Her narrative also shows explicitly what school leaders can do to create school environments in which teachers feel supported, respected, and where they can grow as educators for social justice.

6 Conclusion

Taking from the narratives, we noted the varied levels of support that our teachers needed when they first began to teach and the different types of support they received in their schools. Some teachers described communicating openly with their principals (Clare) and getting help through co-teachers (Clare and Rachael) and peer mentors (Tracie). These practices match recommendations for early-career teachers. New teachers need school leaders whom they can trust to help them build instruction that is rigorous, culturally sustaining, and critical. Structures that include frequent, respectful communication where school leaders listen and respond to issues that concern teachers most and establish systems of faculty mentoring and collaboration are key components of effective leadership. These components provide the best hope that schools will be able to retain and further develop talented teachers who are committed to social equity.

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