Critical Concepts of Mentoring in an Urban Context

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Given the increasing challenges faced by high-poverty urban schools, mentoring has become the panacea for policy makers interested in a quick-fix solution to the teacher quality dilemma. As a result, mentoring programs have experienced exponential growth with little empirical attention during the last decade. This 16-month qualitative investigation within a large city in the northeastern United States, sought to better understand the work of mentors in high-poverty urban schools. Analysis of the data collected led to the identification of three assertions that highlight the interplay that occurs in the urban teacher mentoring context between four critical concepts: novice teacher survival, novice teacher success, onus of responsibility, and a social justice stance. Implications are discussed related to the need for adequate resources, placement, and preparation of mentors in high-poverty schools. Additionally, the study also asserts the role that a passion for or a disposition toward social justice plays in the success and survival of both mentors and novice teachers in urban contexts.

Today, inner-city schools face conditions such as overcrowding, inadequate facilities, limited funding, violence, and an uncertified or alternatively certified work force (Ingersoll, 2001; Kozol, 1991; Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Meyerson, 2001; Weiner, 1993) with these challenges intensifying in the next decade. Typically, the teachers working in urban schools in which the minority enrollment is greater than 50% tend to leave at rates more than twice those of teachers in schools with fewer minorities (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2002; NCES, 1998 as cited in Haycock, 2000). Additionally, teachers with the least amount of teaching experience are most often found in high-poverty schools (Carey, 2004) and often beginning teaching in high-poverty schools brings special challenges, many of which are difficult for an experienced teacher to handle. The challenges associated with this situation makes efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers for students in urban schools extremely difficult (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997; United States Government, 2004). These new teachers often lack certification, are teaching out of area, or have not been prepared in their teacher education program for teaching urban children. Many novice teachers experience a "cultural mismatch" or lack of "cultural synchronization" as they walk into classrooms with students who have extremely different life experiences and backgrounds than their own (Claycomb, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Major & Brock, 2003; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). These novice teachers often have not engaged in critical self-reflection about their own beliefs about teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), diverse groups of students, or possible deficit thinking toward urban families (Valencia, 1997). Many novice teachers have not been exposed to culturally responsive pedagogy or curriculum design that involves connections to students' cultures (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In the last decade, induction programs for new teachers have been springing up across the United States to help retain and support new teachers working in high-poverty, high-need schools (United States Department of Education, 2004). The mentoring of new inductees is one way to address the recruitment and retention needs of new teachers in urban schools (Wang & Odell, 2002) as mentoring typically consists of situational adjustment, technical advice, and emotional support. A decade ago, Feiman-Nemser (1996) noted that to inform mentoring policy and practice, we needed to know more about how mentors learn to work with novices in productive ways as well as what structures enable that work. Since then, Athanases & Achinstein (2003) in their efforts to understand how mentors can help novices with issues of inequity in their teaching indicate that "a part of the problem is the lack of an articulated knowledge base for such mentoring. We still know little about expertise needed to mentor novices on equity and diversity, and we have little empirical evidence identifying how such a knowledge base is enacted." Rushton (2001; 2003) concurs that the field remains underdeveloped as he identified the paucity of research in the area of understanding the supports that novice teachers in urban contexts require to be successful. Thus, understanding how to provide quality mentoring for new inductees in inner-city schools remains essential and under-examined in the empirical literature.

To these ends, this study explores: (1) In what ways do mentors conceptualize and enact their work with novice teachers? (2) What unique challenges do these mentors face in their work? and (3) In what ways do these mentors address the unique challenges of learning to teach in an urban context with their mentees?

PROGRAM SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION

To explore these research questions we used unique and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify the Urban Mentoring Program (UMP) located within a large school district in the northeastern United States as the context for our study. The UMP was initially supported by funds from a large private foundation and supplemented by a grant from the State Department of Education (SDE). The UMP was a part of the school district's Department of Professional Development (DPD) and the UMP coordinator reports directly to the director of DPD. The coordinator supervises the activities of all the mentors, and is primarily responsible for evaluating the performance of the mentors, supervising their work in the schools, and communicating with involved principals about the program.

The UMP is unique in that it provides full-time mentors to those schools most in need of such services. UMP offers principals a package deal consisting of assistance with placement of new teachers and mentoring of new teachers in the school. Decisions about which schools will be offered services are made based on the following criteria: Reconstitution-eligible status, high new-teacher attrition, 50% or more of the student population receiving free or reduced [cost] meals, and at least 10 first- and second-year teachers. Program mentors spend three and a half days each week in their schools coaching these novice teachers. A mentor's job can take many forms, and the range of activities in which they engage is enormous including everything from the observation and critique of new teachers' practice, to preparing materials for teachers, to assisting new teachers with their evaluations, to helping teachers integrate technology.

Using this organizational framework for mentoring, this program hired 12 mentors to work with novice teachers within 15 under-resourced schools within one zone in the system. This zone included: two high schools, three middle schools, and seven elementary schools. These novice teachers were entering the profession through non-college of education, alternative pathways (e.g., Teach for America, District-initiated programs). Each mentor was assigned 12–15 new teachers and worked predominantly within one school.

This school district shares many of the distinctive attributes of other urban contexts. First, like its urban district counterparts, the urban district selected for study was beset by many problems, including a decreasing tax base, aging facilities, overcrowded schools, struggling students, high student mobility, as well as increasing state pressure for higher student test scores. Not surprisingly, this urban district had difficulty recruiting and retaining new highly qualified teachers. Hence, this district instituted the UMP. The criteria for becoming a UMP school included eligibility for

school restructuring due to ongoing low performance, high attrition of new teachers, no less than 50% of the student population on free or reduced meals, and at least ten first- and second-year teachers. Beginning as well as experienced teachers found UMP schools extremely challenging teaching environments. The schools were considered in the most need of resources and support within the district and, as a result, a full time mentor was hired for each school to work intensely with a cadre of new uncertified teachers of record who were pursuing alternative certification.

Secondly, we selected this district for study as its mentoring program possessed many elements identified in the literature as essential for successfully mentoring new urban educators (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Lieberman, 1995). For example, full-time mentors with experience teaching in urban settings were provided to each UMP school. These mentors had a daily presence within each new teacher's classrooms, did not engage in any part of the teacher evaluation process, and self-selected the mentoring activities needed based on school context and individual teacher needs. These mentoring activities included, but were not limited to: coplanning, collaborative study of a new inductee's practice, preparation of materials for and with teachers, coaching of instruction, assistance in preparing for performance evaluations, and help in accessing resources. The UMP mentors believed creating a supportive context was a central part of their role and established an explicitly stated norm describing their relationships and mentoring:

> Mentoring cannot be forced, but must be based in a trusting relationship created by two willing participants. Mentoring does not work when the mentor is directed to help a particular mentee, but only when the mentee welcomes and even seeks out the help of the mentor. Trust is essential, and must be backed up by keeping confidential all communication between the mentor and the mentee. For this reason the mentor cannot be involved in the evaluation of the mentee or report directly to the mentee's principal. (UMP Program Documentation, 2002)

A third reason this program was selected for study was that UMP mentors created and shared a set of core beliefs that envisioned mentoring as being more than a technical enterprise. The mentors were committed to both supporting new teachers' development and to creating a collaborative school culture. In one UMP mentor's voice:

> Much of my work has really focused on working with the principal to rethink the way the school feels to teachers. We are working on getting teachers to talk to each other, work with each other, and have at least a little trust… (3.88.2002)

UMP mentors were provided with the "authentic space" to conceptualize the form and focus of their work based on the needs of their mentees and school context. In this case, the term spaces, like those discussed by Miller (1990) and Greene (1986), refer to the level of involvement or "say-so" mentors have in making

decisions about their work with new teachers. Thus, authentic space refers to each mentor having a voice in shaping one's own work rather than focusing on technical or bureaucratic tasks designed by those further from the work. The mentor teachers who worked in this program viewed flexibility and autonomy as essential:

> You have to throw a lot of the traditional stuff out the window because as far as I know, no one has done research that offers [mentors] the perfect solution to the cases that we face [in helping new teachers] each day. You know what I mean – no one can tell you exactly what or how to teach a child who is acting a certain way or the right thing to do with a child who was sexually abused last night, lives with his Aunt, just lost his father, and has left his notebook at the babysitter's house. (Interview, J.P., 1.56.2002)

Acknowledging these ambiguities in teaching became a part of the mentor's pedagogy. As a result the UMP program created a pedagogical focus that embraced two overarching goals:

> (1) To build on previous preparation, knowledge, skills, and experience in order to increase instructional competence; and (2) To provide instructional and interpersonal support that encourages new educators to analyze and reflect upon their teaching, and to build a foundation for the continued study of teaching. (UMP Program Documentation, 2002)

Mentors described an analysis and reflection cycle, similar to reflective coaching (Nolan & Hoover, 2004) and teacher inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001), as essential to their work with mentees. These UMP pedagogical goals and the tools used to realize those goals explicitly recognized the intricacies associated with the very demanding conditions of teaching within urban schools and the importance of reflection in creating a strong teaching practice, making this particular context a ripe setting to understand the complexity of mentoring new teachers in an urban context.

This program provided intensive and highly contextualized mentoring support to alternatively prepared teachers in poor-performing, under-resourced schools. The intensive and contextualized nature of the work required that mentors be highly involved in conceptualizing their daily work with teachers based on the teachers' expressed and observed needs rather than drawing exclusively on a set of bureaucratic directives or technical expectations that often direct the mentoring work in large school districts. By selecting the UMP program, we were able to understand the concepts that influenced how mentors conceptualized and enacted their work with novice teachers in urban classrooms.

METHODS

The research questions guiding this study included: (1) In what ways do UMP mentors conceptualize and enact their work with novice teachers?, (2) What unique challenges do these mentors face in their work?, and (3) In what ways do these mentors address the unique challenges of learning to teach in an urban context? Given the nature of these research questions, this study is of qualitative design, epistemologically grounded in constructivism (Patton, 2002). Using this epistemology requires that the researchers become involved in the research to help "construct the subjective reality that is under investigation" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). In a constructivist study, the researchers use naturalistic methods, which require that a great deal of time be spent in the natural setting of the participants in order to discover how they experience their surroundings (Hatch, 2002). To these ends, the research team spent two–three days a month for 16 months with the participants. Constructivism as a theoretical framework paired with our regular involvement, allowed us to capture instances that reflect how mentors conceptualized their work with novices. These instances provided insights into mentors' thoughts and actions related to how they approach the unique challenges they face as they mentor within an urban context.

The theoretical perspective of constructivism emphasizes the individual's meaning making and focuses on the individual mind's interaction with the world (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994). Constructivism places value on each individual's unique experience and point of view (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, within this study we chose to focus data collection and analysis on the mentors' experiences in the UMP mentoring context. While we acknowledge the importance of the mentees' perspectives, this study puts the mentors' experience at the center in order to highlight the complexity and intricate nature of the mentoring pedagogy needed to support novice teachers in urban contexts.

Methods for this study included individual interviews, observation, three focus groups, analysis of documents, and interpretation of data (Crotty, 1998; Hatch, 2002). The interviews and focus groups were approximately sixty minutes long, informal in nature, and explored how the mentors conceptualized and enacted their mentoring. During the focus groups and interviews, the researchers probed for clarification in the form of examples around emerging themes that appeared relevant to the research questions. The researchers collected 16 months of data and engaged in ongoing analysis. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the privacy of the individuals studied.

Data analysis began with multiple readings of the entire data set to identify how UMP mentors conceptualized and enacted their work. Although many pieces of data were interesting to read, the first step was to engage in data reduction by only identifying data that shed light on the research questions. After engaging in data reduction, our initial analysis searched for unifying codes related to how mentors conceptualized and enacted their work as well as illustrations of how they

handled the challenges they experienced as they mentored teachers in urban contexts. During this level of analysis, data was coded and categorized conceptually using HyperResearch 2.6 and the locations of the excerpts within the data set were noted using the eight-digit HyperResearch notation.

After generating a list of 18 conceptual codes in the first analysis, we collapsed the codes into four critical concepts that represented how mentors conceptualize and enact their work with novice teachers. The concepts which included novice teacher survival, novice teacher success, onus of responsibility, and a social justice stance are presented in Table 1, which indicates the frequency or strength of the concepts' representation within the data set.

TABLE 1. Contrasting orientations toward literacy pedagogy and practice

Concept	Frequency
Novice teacher survival	68
Novice teacher success	17
Onus of responsibility	11
A social justice stance	24

After identifying the critical concepts within the larger data set, we explored those concepts more deeply by creating three case records (Patton, 2002), which specifically explored three mentors' narratives. We did this by narrowing the data set from twelve to three mentors (Winona, Wesley, and Theresa) representing diversity across race, gender, and age. Winona was a white 50-year-old woman; Wesley was a white man in his mid-thirties; and Theresa was a black woman in her late twenties. Drawing on narratives constructed from this subset of data, we were able to identify how the four concepts interacted to illustrate three assertions. Table 2 presents the three assertions, culled from the interplay between the four concepts as related to Winona, Wesley, and Theresa's narrative, and indicates the number of explicit illustrations of each assertion.

We should note that the interviews and focus groups served as the primary reporting data for the assertions because of the succinct ability of the mentor voices to illustrate the findings. Other data sources were used for triangulation as well as situating the interview and focus group data within a context. Throughout this analysis, investigator and source triangulation occurred as well as member checking (Patton, 2002). This triangulation and multi-step analysis served to build trustworthiness in the study and permitted deeper insight into how mentors conceptualized and enacted their work.

TABLE 2. Three assertions culled from interplay between four critical concepts

Assertion	Mentor		
	Winona	Wesley	Theresa
Assertion 1: Mentors must negotiate tensions between helping mentees survive their first years of teaching in a challenging context, ensuring that their mentees successfully focus on student learning, and helping their mentees accept responsibility for their own professional learning.	1	2	3
Assertion 2: Fostering a commitment to and passion for social justice help the mentor and mentee navigate the tensions that exist between survival (responding to the bureaucracy and micropolitics of teaching in an urban school) and success (focus on all students' learning and their own professional learning).	3	2	3
Assertion 3: If teacher retention and development is the goal, mentors must work with school leadership to actively nurture a learning culture within the school.	2	3	1

FINDINGS

Assertion 1: Mentors must negotiate tensions between helping mentees survive their first years of teaching in a challenging context, ensuring that their mentees successfully focus on student learning, and helping their mentees accept responsibility for their own professional learning.

Emerging from the UMP mentors' work was the interplay of their activities targeted at assuring teacher survival within the system, facilitating the teacher's success in teaching children, and determining the onus of the responsibility for the mentee's success and survival at different points within the induction period. Over four decades ago, Fuller (1969) identified a sequence of concerns that emerge as novice teachers encounter the complexities of the classroom. These ranged from early concerns focused on self and survival to task and impact concerns. Although this assertion supports the sequence of Fuller's findings, the tensions associated with this assertion also illustrate the compounded nature, intensity, and complexity of the survival need when novices work in high-poverty schools and in an era of intense accountability pressure.

In this case, what it takes for a new teacher to survive and be successful within the urban school system was often at odds. For example, novice teachers in this school system were expected by the administration to implement a packaged curriculum that existed for every targeted subject area. According to the mentors the curriculum was chosen to "make teaching teacher proof" (1.120.2002). The UMP mentors recognized the "implausibility and impossibility" (2.222.2002) of

providing new teachers with simple formulas for pedagogical and curricular success. As former teachers in an urban setting, the mentors understood the complexity of urban teaching and the importance of helping new teachers become skilled at differentiating instruction to accommodate diverse student needs, something that is difficult to achieve with administration constantly checking on the progress a teacher is making in "covering" the mandated packaged curriculum. For their mentees, survival (pleasing the system and abiding by district expectations) was connected to "getting through" the mandated curriculum. Success (having all students in the classroom learn) was connected to diversifying instruction, which sometimes meant adapting or abandoning mandated packaged curriculum materials completely to address social and emotional issues, or academic challenges particular learners were experiencing. Hence, UMP mentors needed to simultaneously help their mentees to abide by district expectations and be at certain places in the curriculum at certain times, and change or adjust the curriculum in relationship to meeting the needs of the learners within the classroom. To these ends, mentors taught new teachers how to negotiate within and between the mandated curriculum to meet the needs of their students.

As illustrated in the example above, in this context, both new teachers and mentors believed that being successful and surviving were separate and often competing outcomes. This distinction was summarized in a comment from a new teacher:

> Survival and success are two different things. Survival means that you are pleasing the system and abiding by the many expectations that are important to the administration and bureaucracy of the system. Succeeding is the important part, but it is very different. Succeeding is about the kids' learning. (45.120.2002)

For the UMP mentors, survival was related to helping the new teacher "play the game" and "learn the system." The UMP mentors echoed this distinction as they discussed the high degree of responsibility they felt for the mentees' survival within the system:

> I just want to help my teachers survive. (1.23.2002)
> My main goal is to walk the line that lets me help my new teachers, lets me stay within the program, and still not get thrown out of the school. (2.67.2002)
> I just want to help new teachers hang in there for the rest of the year. (6.156.2002)

The mentors saw their first priority as "protecting" new teachers so that they would remain in the classroom ("survive"). Yet, many UMP mentors acknowledged the importance of simultaneously attending to survival but moving their mentees beyond survival. For example, Winona, a white female UMP mentor with many years of experience teaching in urban schools, stressed the importance of moving

her new teachers toward approaching professional learning in a way that realizes success for their students:

> They [new teachers] are ultimately responsible for their own success and survival. My biggest challenge is to put the responsibility of the job in front of them and have them take it. They need to start questioning and become a reflective practitioner if they are going to be successful. I need to get them to the point where they want responsibility for their job. (2.441.2002)

The above quote illustrates that negotiating who was responsible for new teacher success and survival required a delicate and shifting balance between the mentor and mentee throughout the year.

In order to support mentees in negotiating between the mandated curriculum and student needs as well as other points of survival and success, UMP mentors had to help mentees navigate the micropolitics operating within the school context. Micropolitics refer to the overt and covert or formal and informal processes used to acquire and exercise power to promote or protect interests within an organization (Blasé, 1991; Malen, 1994). Understanding the micropolitics within a school gives insight into how far policies and procedures can be adapted or changed before administrators or other staff members may react negatively or reprimand the practice. In essence, how far can a teacher go in the name of success or student learning before his or her survival is threatened?

In sum, the UMP mentors made a clear distinction between survival and success of their mentees. They often found themselves deliberately considering how much responsibility they should accept for the survival and success of new teachers within these hard-to-teach contexts. The challenge was to help new teachers be successful and survive, in tandem, even when success and survival seemingly required different actions. Helping the new teacher to accept responsibility was a quality that needed to be supported and nurtured given that new teachers typically feel demoralized and dispirited as well as anxious about their efficacy and their capacity to cope within these challenging contexts. Negotiating the sometimes competing demands of survival and success as well as helping the new teacher accept responsibility for both survival and success occurred when mentors made their commitment to social justice an explicit part of their mentoring work.

Assertion 2: Fostering a commitment to and passion for social justice helps the mentor and mentee navigate the tensions that exist between survival (responding to the bureaucracy and micropolitics of teaching in an urban school) and success (focusing on all students' learning and their own professional learning).

To illustrate this assertion, we return to UMP mentor, Winona. According to Winona, a passion for social justice is necessary to confront the barriers that often inhibit teacher learning:

> That [passion] is a good thing for me to have, and I think that the new teachers see that passion really helps. Passion overpowers the despair.

> This is a despairing place. If you have a passion, then despair doesn't tear you apart. In fact, it maybe just feeds the passion. I feel that sharing this passion is a responsibility bigger than my job. It is a human responsibility. (2.447.2002)

Winona frequently described her own "passion" for the job and how she works to ignite passion in her mentees. Yet, she also acknowledged limits to what she could accomplish:

> I can't give them passion. I can only show it to them. The responsibility of my job is to give the teachers the respect that encourages them to take on the profession for themselves. (2.501.2002)

According to Winona and many of her peers, passion is essential to being a successful urban teacher given that passion provided the energy needed to develop new teacher "knowledge of teaching" as well as "knowledge of the micropolitics of urban schools" (Ball, 1987; Blasé & Anderson, 1995) that might enable them to survive. Winona noted the importance of these areas to new teacher survival and success, and viewed passion for social justice as the foundation for reaching professional responsibility and independence. Furthermore, she believed mentors must help ignite that passion as they scaffold new teachers to assume the onus of the responsibility for their own success and survival.

The ways mentors ignite passion for social justice in their mentees is best illustrated through the work of UMP mentor, Theresa. Theresa, an African American mentor in her late twenties, had spent five years teaching in an urban classroom before becoming a mentor. She believed one of her greatest challenges as a mentor was helping new teachers embrace, understand, and attend to issues of race and class as they taught. Her passionate commitment to social justice underscored her work and influenced both the mentoring context she created and the pedagogy of her mentoring.

> As a mentor, I want my teachers to see my passion for teaching all of these children. I was very serious about my teaching and they need to see teaching as a profession, not a game. Knowing how strongly I feel about it hopefully will rub off on them and if they don't feel that way, we can work on how to get them to that point. But if they aren't passionate about teaching these children, then I can't make someone love teaching. (1.820.2002)

The above excerpt highlights UMP mentors' belief that mentoring includes sharing one's own stance with new teachers. In this case, Theresa's position on social justice was highly influenced by her personal passion for and commitment to making sure that all children learn. Theresa believed you couldn't love teaching unless you are passionate about understanding and improving the lives of children in urban schools. Additionally, her use of the word "game" signified the potential

for teachers to become pawns of the bureaucratic machine that often characterizes large urban school systems. Theresa preferred to help new teachers create a professional stance toward teaching that was passionate enough to overcome the "game of rules" and enhance the lives of students in high-poverty schools.

As a result of her own commitment to social justice, Theresa targeted helping novice teachers embrace this same commitment:

> First, I want them to make sure this is what they really want to do. Evaluate yourself and see if you are really dedicated to teaching and to teaching these children, because if you are not, then you are going to have a hard time. Some of the teachers admit that they did not want to teach in this school. The teachers that struggle are those who didn't want to teach in an area where there was a high rate of poverty. They wanted a school that was a little bit cleaner or smaller. They need to know that if you want to teach in the city you will most likely be teaching African American children who are poor. They may not live with their parents. Their parents may be on drugs. They may not eat in the morning. They may go to sleep late. New teachers need to know what that means and what that brings to the classroom. (1.440.2002)

We interrupt Theresa's account to note that she now shifted from her focus on nurturing a commitment to teaching that emerged out of her concern for social justice to examining how this position influenced her mentoring pedagogy. Theresa continues:

> So I tell them… when you say sit down and they don't sit down, be willing to find out what is causing them to not sit down when you say that. New teachers are afraid to take the time because of the time it takes and the pressure they feel from the system. That is one thing I try to teach my mentees. Sometimes you have "to stray" [from the system requirements/curriculum] to find out what is going on in your class. Because you are not going to teach until these basic needs get sorted out. When I taught I used to stop everything and say, "We have to have a classroom meeting about what is happening." And the children can tell you. I believe some teachers are afraid to hear what is going on. One of the things I try to encourage my mentees to do is to go on home visits. (1.774.2002)

This excerpt raised some key challenges that urban mentors face in working with novice teachers. In this example, once the new teacher with the mentor's guidance cultivated the ability to "hear what children needed," the mentor's next job required supporting the novice in developing the ability to do something about what they "hear."

Theresa's pedagogical challenges continued as she introduced a new teacher to the community and home life of his students. The following example highlights

the intentional integration of her passion for social justice with her mentoring pedagogy and context:

> I took one of my mentees on a home visit. He was shocked to see on one side of the boy's home there was an abandoned building and on the other side there were teenage boys who were visibly selling drugs or doing something illegal, and all the other houses were boarded up on the street. He was like, "Now I understand." We went to five houses that day, and he learned something from all of them. This [one particular home visit] was the one boy that was giving him the most problems. This teacher began to understand why the child was causing the problems and understood that he was looking for so much attention in school because he was not getting it at home. (1.734.2002)

Theresa's pedagogical decision to take this new teacher into the community helped to build a relationship but also shook up the new teacher's beliefs about this child enough for the new teacher to re-examine his existing practices. Theresa and her mentee could search for the funds of knowledge and assets present within the community as well as gain a better understanding of his students' life outside of school (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In doing so, Theresa moved beyond the technical aspects of mentoring and teaching to broadening this new teacher's sphere of understanding to include the home lives of her students.

In sum, this assertion highlights the importance of possessing a passion for social justice in the mentors' and novice teachers' work. In the mentors' work, their pedagogy of mentoring strengthens when driven by a passion for social justice. Similarly, igniting this passion within novice teachers serves to strengthen the likelihood of their success and survival. The passion fuels their commitment to both improving their teaching and negotiating the day-to-day, face-to-face power-driven micropolitical interactions that happen between individuals and groups of people who work in schools (Blasé & Anderson, 1995). As indicated in these examples, cultivating a stance of social justice in novice teachers requires mentors to possess a sophisticated set of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Additionally, we learn from these mentors the importance of not only cultivating this passion but also fueling this passion if these novice teachers are going to both survive and succeed.

Assertion 3: If teacher retention and development is the goal, mentors must work with school leadership to actively nurture a learning culture within the school.

Wesley, a white, male teacher in his mid-thirties with 10 years of urban teaching experience, mentors out of a deep political commitment and passion for making schools healthy and productive places for all students and teachers. He believes he must contribute to creating a learning culture within his school in order to retain and develop novice teachers. Wesley struggles with his mentor role and how his role can contribute to retaining and preparing new teachers within a school

culture described by the mentor as "toxic," not emphasizing teacher learning and professional development. Thus, his mentoring efforts grow out of a feeling of agency to improve the conditions of schooling so that both children and teachers learn within a supportive community.

As a result, Wesley's mentoring not only encourages new teacher pedagogical development but he has also conceptualized his role as a catalyst for improving the whole school's teaching and learning processes.

> The new principal came in and people weren't sure what was going to happen. Well, nothing is going to happen, he shares no vision…. There is no action at all; the school became very unsafe, very chaotic, the halls are not clear this year, teachers want to quit, and some teachers have quit already. The principal will be retiring in a couple of years, and everybody has the perception that he is just here to finish out his career…. That is where I came in. I am now "mentoring" the eighth grade principal to help her out with her situation. And I am "mentoring" the school principal to help put together a roundtable discussion of teachers and administrators in the school [to start talking about the problems the school is facing]. (32.54.2002)

Out of his concern for the declining school culture, Wesley conceptualizes part of his mentoring responsibility as helping his school create a less toxic and more collaborative school culture. He does this by recognizing the role that school culture plays in new teacher success and survival.

Wesley chooses this level of agency and commitment toward nurturing a learning culture because he believes that new teachers will not be retained without enhancing their school's culture. Wesley identifies small steps made toward his goal of creating a learning culture that supports both success and survival:

> Today when I got into school, two teachers who had been invited to the [roundtable] meeting said they wanted the other teachers on their team to have the opportunity to give their thoughts on ways to improve the school. So what was once a high degree of malaise is now starting to show some renewed energy. It has been slow doing it. You just can't go into the principal's office and say, "Look, this is what you need to do." So, I have had to get them to trust me and what I am doing. (74.332.2002)

Central to this work is relationship building. Wesley explains that relationship building has been important to his own ability to negotiate the micropolitics of the school as he moves outside the parameters of his individual work with novice teachers to help create a culture that encourages teacher retention.

Finally, Wesley's work reveals that his underlying commitment to social justice drives his work to improve the school's culture:

> These kids deserve better and so do the new teachers. They can't keep up when they get half a day's instruction and kids in the suburbs are getting a full day…. A kid tells me that their teacher is awful and says she wants to quit. Some of the teachers sit at their desk all day. They know that they have a horrible teacher and they give up. Like I said, they all deserve better. That's what brings me to work each day. (99.232.2002)

Wesley's commitment to improving the instruction in the school fuels his willingness to expand his initial conception of mentoring as limited to coaching teachers within their classrooms. He pushes the boundaries of his mentoring role on behalf of the children in his school.

In sum, this assertion highlights the important role that school-based mentors can play in working with others to transform a toxic culture into a learning culture. This role requires a deep involvement of the mentor at the school level and a keen understanding of how to develop a learning culture. In the mentors' work, their commitment to this effort strengthens when driven by a passion for social justice. Mentors who draw on this passion and possess a skill set that allows them to navigate the school culture are likely to participate in mentoring activities that move beyond individual support for the novice teacher to engage in school culture improvement efforts.

DISCUSSION

This study described the ways mentors who work within under-resourced urban schools conceptualize and enact their work with novice teachers. By studying how mentors conceptualize and enact their work based on the knowledge they constructed as they developed their mentoring practice, we have made visible a set of critical concepts. The four critical concepts that mentors believed deserved attention as they worked included: novice teacher survival, novice teacher success, onus of responsibility, and a social justice stance. Survival is highly related to relational and contextual (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2007) or humanistic support (Wang & Odell, 2002). Alternatively, success is highly related to professional knowledge construction (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2007). The distinction made between success and survival as well as the importance of attending to both is consistent with Feiman-Nemser's (2003) reminder that keeping teachers in teaching is not the same as helping them become good teachers. The second two concepts, personal responsibility and a social justice stance, point to the importance of nurturing these dispositions as a part of one's mentoring practice. Although this study indicates that mentors identify these two dispositions as critical to new teachers' success and survival in working in under-resourced contexts, future research needs to explore how and if these dispositions can be fostered.

In addition to identifying these concepts, this study also identified the unique challenges these mentors face in their work. These challenges emerged in the form of three assertions. The first assertion, *mentors must negotiate tensions between helping mentees survive their first years of teaching in a challenging context, ensuring that their mentees successfully focus on student learning, and helping their mentees accept responsibility for their own professional learning*, illuminates the on-going tension experienced by both mentors and new teachers as they struggled with issues of survival, success, and personal responsibility. Resolving this tension between success and survival requires the mentors and the new teachers to understand, inquire into, and at times challenge the micropolitics that work within the individual school context (Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991; Hoyle, 1986; Malen, 1994). Power, influence, authority, conflict, and collaboration within the school community shape these micropolitical interactions. Due to the nature of struggling urban schools, the micro-political interactions become visible in interactions between teachers, administrators, children, and parents. Because these interactions are so unmediated by structures and formal policies, they become highly personal and very emotional to the educators who feel compelled to respond to them or, at the very least, navigate these murky situations.

The second assertion, *fostering a commitment to and passion for social justice helps the mentor and mentee navigate the tensions that exist between survival and success*, illuminates a social justice stance as a guiding force of mentors' pedagogy in urban contexts as well as successful mentee practice in an urban context. Given that this assertion highlights the importance of cultivating a stance of social justice in novice teachers, mentors must possess a sophisticated set of knowledge, skills, and abilities related to social justice. Given that the selection criteria for many mentoring programs does not include attention to these dispositions, many mentors will need to engage in their own professional development and self-reflection about social justice before even thinking about how to support novice teachers in developing a social justice stance to their work. Unfortunately, many professional development and training efforts for mentors often do not contain an explicit focus on social justice.

The third assertion, *if teacher retention and development is the goal, mentors must work with school leadership to actively nurture a learning culture within the school*, highlights the importance of dedicating adequate resources to developing mentors who can participate in cultivating a learning culture. In order to assume this role in a meaningful way, mentors need to understand the process of creating a learning culture, become a visible part of the fabric of the school, and have opportunities to develop an understanding of the micropolitics of the school context.

In combination, each of these assertions suggests that mentors in urban contexts need to be tightly coupled with the school context and available for a face-to-face version of "just-in-time mentoring." The complexity and urgency of their work requires something significantly more substantial than the "drive-by"

mentoring that is often short term, superficial, and offered by mentors who are often assigned to large numbers of novice teachers in different schools across the city. The dedication of time and resources to urban mentor development of the skills associated with these assertions as well as placement of mentors in the schools where a critical mass of new teachers are working are essential components contributing to the success and survival of new teachers. The degree to which these components are attended to will influence the effectiveness of any district mentoring program. Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) discussed the importance of understanding beginning teachers' micropolitical experiences as important, not only for theory development on teachers' career-long learning, but also for improving the quality of teacher education and induction programs. Future research needs to include gaining an empirically based understanding of the nuances associated with the micropolitics of navigating survival and success. By better understanding the interactions shaped by power, influence, authority, conflict, and collaboration within the urban school community, teacher preparation and induction programs could better prepare prospective mentors and teachers for urban schools.

These assertions also suggest that igniting a passion for social justice helps the novice teacher and the mentor take on the responsibility of negotiating success and survival. If this is the case, then mentoring programs need to consider how to help ignite this passion within mentors as well as support mentors in figuring out how to ignite this passion within mentees. The development of a social justice stance needs further research in order to better inform program development and mentoring pedagogy. Future research questions may include: Where does this social justice stance originate? Are all mentors and mentees able to develop this passion? How can mentor programs help develop a social justice commitment within mentors? How do mentors successfully ignite a social justice commitment within new teachers? Can new teachers be successful in urban contexts without a commitment to social justice? Although controversy continues to exist regarding the role dispositions should play in teacher education (Hines, 2007), this study indicates that ignoring the importance of cultivating or igniting a social justice stance in both mentor and novice teacher development could be detrimental to the retention of well-prepared teachers in high-poverty urban schools.

According to Feiman-Nemser (2003), as mentoring programs are springing up across the country, program developers must recognize that most policy mandates lack an understanding of the learning needs of beginning teachers, particularly in urban schools, and the resources required to create effective mentoring programs. This study points out that in order to enact these three assertions, mentors must become visible and highly active participants within the school building. They need to understand the existing school culture, the school's unique micropolitics, the curriculum demands, and the needs of the individual students in the classrooms where they mentor. To meet these demands, mentoring cannot rely on weekly visits from those outside of the school nor can mentoring rely on using "the buddy teacher

next door method." Mentoring in under-resourced urban schools requires substantive, targeted resources if we are going to address new teacher success and survival as well as cultivate dispositions of responsibility and social justice. Attention to these concepts, as well as additional research on urban teacher mentoring, will create the extensive network of supports necessary to ensure recruitment, retention, and success of teachers for our urban schools.

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