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## **Counting on Colleagues: New Teachers Encounter the Professional Cultures of Their Schools**

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*Within the context of an impending teacher shortage, this article considers the professional cultures that new teachers encounter in their schools. Using new entrants' accounts, we characterized three types of professional cultures or subcultures within schools: veteran-oriented cultures, novice-oriented cultures, and integrated cultures. In veteran-oriented cultures, new teachers described norms of professional interaction determined, in large part, by the veterans, with little attention to the particular needs of beginning teachers. In novice-oriented cultures, on the other hand, new teachers described norms of professional interaction determined by novices, thus leaving them with little experienced guidance about how to teach. However, in integrated professional cultures, new teachers described being provided with sustained support and having frequent exchanges with colleagues across experience levels. Principals proved to be important in developing and maintaining integrated professional cultures where the particular needs of new teachers were both recognized and addressed.*

**F**rom the very first day that a new teacher enters the classroom, she becomes responsible for the intellectual, emotional, and social development of a diverse group of students. Despite being a novice with little understanding of the school and how it works, she typically is expected to slide gracefully into her role as teacher with all the facility and acumen of a seasoned veteran (Huling-Austin, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Whether the novice teacher succeeds or fails may well depend not only on her own knowledge and skill

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but also on the quality of the interactions the novice teacher has with her colleagues.

The novice teacher, eager to succeed in the classroom and in the school, seeks signals from her colleagues about how they interact with students, what instructional approaches they promote or suppress, what topics they deem appropriate or out of bounds for discussion at meetings, whom they look toward for expert guidance, how they use their planning time, and whether they encourage peers to exercise leadership beyond their classrooms. It is crucial that these signals be clear because, ultimately, teachers' early experiences determine not only their long-term performance in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; McDonald, 1980; McDonald & Elias, 1983; Rust, 1994) but also their decisions about whether to stay in teaching (Adelman, 1991; Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Gold, 1996). Given our nation's need to hire 2.2 million teachers during the next decade, our society's focus on high performance and accountability, and the intense competition among states and districts for the best recruits, new teachers' experiences with their colleagues deserve careful research attention.

Some states and school districts, anticipating novice teachers' needs, sponsor orientation or induction programs. Although models for intensive, school-based programs exist (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Huling-Austin, 1990; Zeichner, 1979), many districts cannot afford to offer them or to meet the increasing demand (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Jerald & Boser, 2000). Also, many districts seem not to recognize how much assistance new teachers need. As a result, they resort to short-term, centralized endeavors, designed to deal with the new teachers as a large batch (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999). However, the novice teacher's work life is centered not in the central office but in her school, with fellow teachers. It is to them that she looks for advice about how to teach well and for support in how to become a full-fledged member of the teaching staff. Whether the novice can count on those colleagues will depend largely on the prevailing norms and patterns of interaction that exist within the school.

In this study, we sought to learn from new teachers about their experiences with their school-based colleagues. Did they have easy access to other teachers and were their interactions comfortable or strained, encouraging or discouraging, meaningful or perfunctory? Furthermore, we wanted to understand from these new teachers' accounts both the organizational structures within which they interact with colleagues and the ways in which principal leadership influences those interactions.

## ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

The analytic framework for this study stands at the intersection of two lines of research. The first examines the experiences of new teachers, and the second examines the professional cultures of the schools.

### The Experiences of New Teachers

The many needs of new teachers are well documented. In 1983, McDonald and Elias studied programs designed to ease beginning teachers' entry into the profession and concluded that novices "experience the transition into teaching as a period of great anxiety and fear, even of trauma" (p. 4). Veenman (1984) reviewed 91 studies and identified the 24 problems most frequently perceived by beginning teachers. The highest ranking problems were "classroom discipline," "motivating students," and "dealing with individual differences" (Veenman, 1984, pp. 154-155). Gold's 1996 review of the literature led her to conclude that "the greatest problems encountered by beginning teachers were overwhelming feelings of disillusionment and believing that they were unable to cope with the multitude of pressures encountered each day" (p. 556). Similarly, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998), through a review of seven longitudinal studies of first-year teachers, confirmed that the first year of teaching is one of dashed expectations. In-depth case studies recount the experiences of new teachers struggling to succeed within an uncertain environment of seemingly insatiable demands and scant support (Brown, 2000; Grossman, 1990; Kane, 1991; Ryan, 1970; Ryan et al., 1980).

A quarter century ago, Lortie (1975) observed that schools create no special status for novice teachers that would provide for measured induction into teaching: "Tasks are not added sequentially to allow for gradual increase in skill and knowledge; the beginner learns while performing the full complement of teaching duties" (p. 72). Fifteen years later, Little (1990a) reiterated Lortie's observation, adding, "Observers spanning at least a century have highlighted the 'reality shock' that commonly follows when novice teachers abruptly and without assistance assume full-scale and full-time responsibilities" (Little, 1990a, p. 322). Most recently, researchers at Recruiting New Teachers (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999) found in their review of induction practices that, even today, there is no special allowance for new teachers: "Reduced workloads for inductees are all but nonexistent" (p. 4).

### Professional Culture

Since the 1980s, educators have looked to organizational theorists to better understand and thus improve schools. Schein (1985, 1992), on whose work many school reformers draw, defined organizational culture as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (1992, p. 12)

Schein noted that “one of the major activities of any new member when she enters a new group” is to “decipher the norms and assumptions that are operating” (1992, p. 13). An individual must develop an accurate “mental map” of the organization, Schein said, to understand others’ expectations (1992, p. 22).

Researchers Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) used the concept of organizational culture to explain the strong corporate cultures of successful businesses. Researchers and practitioners in education enthusiastically drew on this research to study and improve schools, adapting the concept of organizational culture to a concept of school culture, which broadly encompasses students as well as adults, often focusing on the interactions between the two. In a number of intensive case studies, researchers subsequently examined the school culture of comprehensive high schools (Cusick, 1983; Grant, 1988; Lightfoot, 1983; Louis & Miles, 1990; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984), elite boarding schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985), public magnet schools (Metz, 1986), and Catholic schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990; Lesko, 1988).

Some of these researchers, in addition to examining the prevailing values and norms within the schools, documented the organizational structures through which the school culture was expressed and enacted. Bryk and Driscoll (1988) and Lee, Bryk, and Smith (1993) presented a model of “The School as Community,” which includes both informal elements, such as “shared values” and “distinctive patterns of social relations,” as well as formal elements, such as the academic and extracurricular program and teachers’ roles. Bryk et al. (1993) subsequently identified the structures that support strong cultures in Catholic schools. Although there is good evidence that structures do not, in themselves, change school culture (Elmore, Peterson, &

McCarthy, 1996; Evans, 1996), there is also evidence that appropriate organizational structures can support and enhance cultural change<sup>1</sup> (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001; Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Rowan, 1990).

Although analyses of school culture examine the beliefs and experiences of all the participants in the school, including students, parents, administrators, teachers, and support staff, the concept of professional culture used in this study is narrower, focusing on only the teachers and administrators within schools or within subunits of schools. As used here, professional culture is the distinctive blend of norms, values, and accepted modes of professional practice, both formal and informal, that prevail among colleagues.

Since 1980, many researchers have studied professional culture—sometimes calling it teacher culture, adult culture, professional community, or teacher community—and have sought to identify the conditions that promote positive working relationships among teachers. In her early work on teacher collegiality, Little (1982) found that students performed better in schools where teachers work as colleagues rather than as independent instructors—important news for a profession in which teacher isolation and autonomy have long been regarded as the norm (Goodlad, 1984; Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Sizer, 1984). Rosenholtz (1989) studied 78 Tennessee public elementary schools and concluded that teachers in “learning enriched,” as opposed to “learning impoverished,” schools worked collaboratively toward achieving the same instructional goals, had common norms and expectations about their work and relationships, and relied on mechanisms for feedback and evaluation based on shared agreements about their purposes and standards. Johnson (1990) interviewed 115 public- and private-school teachers who reported that collaboration improved both their knowledge of subject matter and their pedagogy. Notably, Little (1990b) explained that real collegiality calls for more than teachers exchanging social pleasantries, offering “aid and assistance,” or even sharing ideas and materials. True collegial work, she argued, is “joint work,” in which teachers share responsibility for instruction and outcomes.

Researchers also have identified and studied professional communities, groups of teachers who work collaboratively and productively on behalf of students. In 1993, Little and McLaughlin identified the distinguishing features of professional communities: They feature intense, personal ties among teachers; are inclusive; and are oriented to children, teaching, and learning. In a subsequent examination of the context of teachers’ work in secondary schools, Talbert and McLaughlin (1996) documented the role of strong, positive teacher communities in improving teachers’ practice. Newmann and Wehlage (1995) demonstrated the importance of professional community in

school improvement, and Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996) found strong professional communities in high-performing schools. In their study of Chicago schools, Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) concluded that the organizational features that typify professional communities "can exist on a broad scale in regular urban elementary schools" (p. 771).

Unlike collegiality or professional community, which are normative, the broader concept of professional culture that guides this study has neither positive nor negative connotations. Although every school does not have collegial staff relations or a strong professional community, each does have a professional culture that influences new teachers' induction into that school. A school's professional culture may endorse hard work, ongoing learning, and frank critiques of pedagogy, or, at the other extreme, it may tolerate minimal effort, rote reliance on past practice, and strict enforcement of classroom privacy. The professional cultures into which new teachers are inducted are critically important because these early years not only confirm new teachers' "choice of an occupation in life" but also lay "a base for future professional development" (McDonald & Elias, 1983). New teachers' early trial and error "coping" strategies (Lortie, 1975) are likely to become "imprinted" (Gold, 1996) in teachers' permanent repertoires, unless beginning teachers are well supported in their early years (McDonald & Elias, 1983).

In the past two decades, those studying professional culture have focused most of their attention on experienced teachers. This is not surprising, given the veteran makeup of the teaching force. Recently, however, scholars have begun, once again, to recognize the importance of new teachers' experiences. Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) noted that not only must professional communities focus on instructional improvement and collective responsibility, but also they must have strategies for sustaining and developing constructive norms and practices over time, attending to "the way in which new members are brought into school faculties" (p. 754). Westheimer (1998), who studied two schools with strong professional communities, also highlighted the importance of bringing new members into faculties and illuminated the different ways in which new teachers became members of distinctively different professional communities.

### **New Teachers Encounter Professional Culture**

Lortie (1975) observed that without a deliberate induction, it is not easy for a new teacher to interpret the professional culture of a new workplace. New teachers lack the "mental maps" that Schein (1992) said new members need to interpret an organizational culture. At the same time, veteran teachers

who have worked together for many years may not realize how hard it is for a newcomer to enter, explore, understand, and, ultimately, find her place among them. Whether and how this occurs will depend on several factors.

First, a new teacher's encounter with professional culture will depend on the group of colleagues with whom she works, how they interact, and whether they welcome novices in their professional exchanges and pay attention to their needs and concerns. The relevant group of teachers and administrators may be the entire faculty (typically the case in small schools) or a department, grade level team, instructional cluster, or other subunit within the school.

Second, the nature of a new teacher's experience with professional culture will depend on whether the school is new (such as a charter or newly restructured school) or well established. Some novice teachers participate from the start, building and defining a school's professional culture. More often, however, they join schools that already have established professional cultures, with set ways of doing things, memories about the past, shared understandings about what is possible, and practiced strategies about how to make things happen or how to resist change. Evans (1996) cited Schein (1992) in observing that

during an organization's birth and early growth, its culture begins as a distinctive competence, a source of identity, the "glue" that holds things together. When an organization reaches maturity—the stage that characterizes most schools—its culture generally becomes a constraint on innovation and a defense against new influences. (p. 46)

In an established, mature school, a new teacher's views and contributions may be excluded, his or her concerns and needs ignored.

Third, a new teacher's introduction to the school's professional culture will be affected by the presence or absence of formal and informal structures that provide the novice with opportunities for interaction, true mentoring, reflection, and exchange. Most current induction programs include elements such as orientation meetings, classroom observation, and mentoring, all of which are intended to aid the novice in acquiring an understanding of and competence in his or her new role and responsibilities. If these formal structures are to be effective, however, they must be school-based and consistent with and reinforced by the norms, values, and practices of the professional culture in which they are embedded (Firestone & Louis, 1999). Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) cautioned against structures that introduce "contrived collegiality" and are incompatible with the prevailing professional norms. Likewise, Little (1990b) commented on the importance of aligning formal ar-



rangements, such as mentoring and observations, with the professional culture:

The prospects for their influence on individuals and organizations rest in part on their congruence with established norms of interactions and interpretations among colleagues, and with the degree to which they fit or conflict with the meaningful reference groups with which teachers align themselves. (p. 530)

### **Principals' Roles in Developing Professional Cultures**

Researchers widely confirm the principal's central role in establishing, reinforcing, and realigning the school culture (Bryk et al., 1993; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Metz, 1978) as well as in promoting collegiality, professional community, and a collective sense of purpose and responsibility among the faculty (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Cusick, 1983; Fullan, 1991; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). That role may be as an "instructional leader" (Murphy, 1990), a "transformational leader" (Murphy, 1994), a "facilitative leader" (Conley & Goldman, 1994), or a "head learner" (Barth, 1991). The principal may rely on "ideas, values, and commitment" (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 34) or may combine "passion, purpose, and meaning" (Deal & Peterson, 1994, p. 41) with the more practical, structural tasks of leadership.

Considerable research attention has been paid to the importance of principals in fostering healthy professional cultures in schools. By contrast, little has been written about their role in orienting and tending a professional culture that provides for the induction of new teachers. Our study draws on the perspectives of new teachers to clarify the principal's role in shaping the professional cultures that these novices encounter.

### **SAMPLE AND RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is based on interview data gathered from 50 first-year and second-year teachers in a wide range of Massachusetts public-school settings: urban and suburban; elementary, middle, and high school; large and small; and conventional and charter.

In selecting our sample of 50, we sought to maximize diversity on a wide range of measures and, thus, identified four sources of potential respondents, which together would enable us to learn about the experiences of a wide range of teachers. These sources included private college and university

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Sample Composition Illustrating Total Number and Percentages of New Teachers in Sample by Gender, Race, Age, Career Stage, and Experience Level (N = 50)**

	n	%
Gender		
Female	33	66
Male	17	34
Race		
White	35	70
Person of color	15	30
Age		
22-29	30	60
30-39	14	28
40-49	4	8
50-54	2	4
Career stage		
First career	26	52
Mid-career	24	48
Experience level		
First year	36	72
Second year	14	28

**TABLE 2**  
**Summary of Sample Composition Illustrating Total Number and Percentages of New Teachers in the Sample by School Characteristics (N = 50)**

	n	%
Level		
Elementary school	22	44
Middle school	15	30
High school	13	26
Setting		
Urban	30	60
Suburban	20	40
School type		
Traditional public	37	74
Charter	13	26

teacher education programs, public university teacher education programs, charter schools (both state sponsored and within district), and the 1999 recipient list of the \$20,000 Massachusetts signing bonus.<sup>2</sup>

In each case, we sought variety within the source groups as well, including, for example, teacher education programs focusing on both undergraduate

and graduate preparation, charter schools offering different kinds of instructional programs, and signing bonus recipients who came from a variety of professional backgrounds. We sought out both first-career and mid-career entrants to teaching. We contacted charter schools directly, either through the heads of these schools or through individual teachers working there. We contacted recipients of the signing bonus directly, using a list of names and schools provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education. In total, only 2 teachers we contacted chose not to participate in the study.

We built this sample gradually and purposively, seeking to attain variation and balance in the gender, race, ethnicity, and age of the individuals and in the types of schools in which they worked. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the respondents in the sample. Table 2 shows the types of schools where they teach. The respondents, who were assured confidentiality and anonymity in any written reports, are identified by pseudonyms throughout this discussion.

Data collection involved one tape-recorded interview (1.5 to 2.5 hours) with each respondent. The interview protocols, informed by extensive analysis of the literature on teachers' work, were designed to gather the new teacher's general responses to the experience of being a novice as well as to elicit each one's views about our four areas of focused inquiry: career, incentives and rewards, professional culture, and curriculum and assessment. The teachers' responses about professional culture are analyzed in this article. An interview protocol is included in the appendix.

### **Data Analysis**

We engaged in a method of multistaged coding to analyze our transcribed interview data. Immediately following each interview, we composed a narrative summary for each respondent, highlighting emphasized topics, unveiling emergent themes, and capturing prominent responses in each of our four areas of inquiry. We analyzed these summaries holistically, in an effort to understand the broad themes emerging from new teachers' descriptions of their experiences. We then engaged in a rigorous analysis of the transcript data, coding them first according to our four major areas of inquiry and then again according to a series of subarea codes based on our analysis of the narrative summaries, a thorough review of the literature, and preliminary data analysis. Having constructed a set of analytic matrices, we moved inductively from teachers' individual perspectives to a conceptualization of three types of professional cultures. Finally, in refining the concepts, we relied on an iterative testing process, moving back and forth from the types of

professional cultures to the details of the interview data and the thematic summaries.

### Limitations

That all teachers in our sample teach in Massachusetts provides both opportunities and constraints in our study. Although there are teacher shortages in some Massachusetts schools (particularly those in low-income neighborhoods) and in certain subjects (math, science, foreign languages, bilingual education, and special education), many certified teachers have trouble finding jobs in the state. Whereas typical public schools in California currently are staffed by large cohorts of young teachers holding emergency credentials (Shields et al., 1999), typical public schools in Massachusetts tend to be staffed by certified teachers, the majority of whom are veterans. In Massachusetts, it is mostly the charter schools, both state sponsored and within district, where one finds high proportions of young, noncertified teachers.

We were trying to understand the professional culture as experienced and described by the new teachers themselves rather than to report the objective truth about the professional culture of any particular school. As a result, we did not try to triangulate descriptions with additional interviews or observations. In several cases, we interviewed multiple respondents within the same school, and, in those cases, we compared their accounts closely, in an effort to understand whether these teachers described similar experiences within the same professional culture.

The purposeful sample of teachers we interviewed does not allow us to generalize to all new teachers in all settings or even to all new teachers in similar settings. However, the respondents' accounts and appraisals are nonetheless informative, provocative, and cautionary. They can assist policy makers and practitioners as they contemplate the needs of the next generation of teachers and assess competing strategies for recruiting them and supporting the early years of their work. The accounts can also guide the way for further research.

### THREE TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL CULTURES

Our analysis of new teachers' accounts of their experiences led us to conceptualize three types of professional cultures. Some new teachers described what we are calling *veteran-oriented professional cultures*, where the concerns

and habits of experienced teachers determined professional interactions. These schools or subunits within the schools typically had a high proportion of senior teachers whose patterns of professional practice were well established. Typically, veteran-oriented cultures, which ranged from friendly to cold, accommodated many experienced teachers who operated independently and with little effect on each other's teaching. New teachers viewed their veteran colleagues in several ways. They regarded some veteran teachers as experts who were confident, effective, and efficient in their work. Yet it seemed to the novices that within veteran-oriented cultures, these expert teachers saw little or no need to interact with new colleagues or discuss their work in depth. There often were other veteran teachers who our respondents said were only moderately effective and minimally involved in the school, and who approached teaching as a job to be done with the least possible interference from others. Finally, our respondents spoke of some veteran teachers who seemed tired of teaching and appeared to be biding their time until retirement. Importantly, veteran-oriented cultures created no special place for the novice teacher and offered little in the way of organized support.

By contrast, in new teachers' descriptions of what we are calling *novice-oriented professional cultures*, inexperience, youth, and idealism prevailed. New teachers who described working within this type of culture were typically in schools staffed with very high proportions of new teachers. Novices at start-up charter schools described working together feverishly and zealously. At these sites, professional interaction was ongoing and intense although generally uninformed by the expertise and wisdom of veteran teachers. But new schools were not the only examples of novice-oriented professional cultures in our sample. Other new teachers described novice-oriented professional cultures in established, conventional public schools. In an attempt to revitalize a failing school, a principal may deliberately fill the ranks with newly minted teachers, or senior teachers may abandon these schools for less desperate settings while newly hired teachers fill their vacancies. Although new teachers in the veteran-oriented cultures experienced no meaningful orientation or sustained induction, they were at least welcomed in the novice-oriented cultures; however, although welcomed, new teachers in novice-oriented cultures were offered little professional guidance about how to teach. Thus, the special needs of the novice teacher were neither recognized nor addressed in the veteran-oriented or the novice-oriented professional cultures.

It was in sites where new teachers described what we are calling integrated professional cultures that new teachers said they were best served. Their colleagues within these schools or within subunits of these schools provided

sustained support and ongoing exchange across experience levels for all teachers; there were no separate camps of veterans and novices. Expert teachers understood the importance of mentoring their novice colleagues and often found that they, themselves, benefited from the exchange. All teachers, veterans and novices alike, were regularly engaged in deliberations about curriculum, instruction, and their shared responsibility for students. Novice teachers found opportunities to develop their teaching, easy access to others' classes, clear expectations, and organized discussions about the needs of students and the improvement of practice.

It is important to note that the school is not the only professional unit that mattered to teachers. Some respondents, particularly those in larger schools, considered their department, cluster, or team of primary importance. Therefore, subcultures or countercultures might exist within a single school, and 2 teachers working in different teams in the same school might well characterize the professional cultures they encounter differently. In our purposive sample, 20 teachers described working in veteran-oriented cultures, 12 described novice-oriented cultures, and 18 described integrated cultures. Of the 37 teachers in regular public schools, 20 described experiences in veteran-oriented professional cultures, 4 described experiences in novice-oriented professional cultures, and 13 described integrated professional cultures. It is not surprising that none of the 13 new teachers from charter schools in our sample described veteran-oriented professional cultures, for charter schools in Massachusetts are mostly newly created and staffed largely by recent college graduates. Of the charter-school teachers, 8 described novice-oriented cultures, and 5 described integrated professional cultures. Although the largest number of elementary-school teachers described veteran-oriented professional cultures (13 out of 20), and the largest number of middle-school teachers described integrated professional cultures (8 out of 15), the high-school teachers described the three types in mostly equal proportions. Likewise, there was no noticeable difference in the ways new teachers in urban and suburban schools described their experiences. We remind readers that these numbers reflect the purposive composition of our sample; our findings, although instructive, cannot be generalized.

Drawing on new teachers' accounts of their experiences, the following discussion characterizes these three types of professional cultures and considers the extent to which each of them provides organized support for new teachers. Finally, the discussion examines the important role that the principal plays in developing the professional culture and ensuring the effective long-term induction of teachers.

## VETERAN-ORIENTED PROFESSIONAL CULTURES

Rachel taught kindergarten in a school with colleagues who, she said, “have all been here for a long time. They’re veteran teachers.” At age 32, Rachel was the youngest teacher in this small, suburban school. She had expected her first year of teaching to be “very stressful” and had hoped to count on the support of others. In describing how she approached work in her new school, she explained, “I go out of my way to really be friendly and make myself part of the team, because I figure these are the people I’m working with.” Being “part of the team” was important to her. She realized that she had to do her part in building collegial relationships with the other teachers: “They’re so busy and they’re so used to their routine that I think it would be difficult for them to really make an effort, whereas for me, I need to make that effort . . . so I’ve done that.” However, 4 months into the school year, Rachel still was going about her work on the fringes of this group: “All of the teachers that are here have been here for so long . . . so I’m just trying to feel my way around right now.”

In some cases, the opportunities that might have helped Rachel become a part of the team were unavailable or disappointing; at worst, the initiatives she took elicited no response. She had “definitely” hoped to join a committee but there were no openings, even on the committee to consider adopting full-day kindergarten, an issue about which, as the school’s only kindergarten teacher, she had both interest and knowledge. She appreciated the faculty’s weekly luncheons but was dismayed that there were no discussions of curriculum or teaching. She wanted to talk with the first-grade teacher about what her kindergarten students would need to know for their next year, but she was intimidated: “I figure in the spring, that’s something that I’ll tackle, just to make sure my kids are on target.” As a student teacher, she had prepared a unit on Egypt that she thought was “great,” but when she gave it to the fourth-grade teacher in her new school, her gesture went unacknowledged: “I haven’t gotten any feedback from her. So would she be willing to share something with me? Probably not. But I love to share ideas.”

Rachel was experiencing her first year of teaching in a professional culture that we characterize as veteran-oriented. Although the staff seemed outwardly friendly, it was not organized to meet her professional needs as a novice teacher. She found herself left alone to discover the best ways to do good work. She was expected to function at the margins of the dominant veteran-oriented culture, and there were no useful links between her and her experienced colleagues.

### **On Being a New Teacher in a Veteran-Oriented Professional Culture**

In veteran-oriented professional cultures, new teachers have no special role or status to ensure that their responsibilities are manageable and that they will have the support and interactions they need. A veteran-oriented culture in which all teachers are expected to assume the same roles and responsibilities may seem, at first, to be a culture of equity. However, because these new teachers are only beginning to learn how to teach and, thus, find themselves stymied by challenges that seasoned teachers handle routinely, the novices often feel left behind and ignored.

Katie, who worked in a large urban elementary school, said she admired her experienced colleagues “who really know what they’re doing,” and she wanted to be “part of this team and contributing.” Yet, she spoke about “admiring” them rather than working closely with them. She was troubled by the gap between their expertise and her skill as a beginner:

I have to remind myself this is my first year and I’m not going to be doing what everyone else is doing . . . What I really should do is look at what is going on around me and learn from it and say to myself, “Okay, in so many years, this is the kind of thing that I could be doing, and I hope I will be doing.” And it’s taken a little while for me to understand that I’m not going to be doing all those things right now.

Although she acknowledged her inexperience and the need to learn, it was hard for a novice like Katie to know how to “do all those things” and how to master the craft of teaching without more focused support.

Whereas Katie was young, Ranya, a mid-career entrant to teaching, was an accomplished scientist now teaching earth science in a suburban high school. She reported that most of her science department colleagues were near retirement and, like Katie’s colleagues, were “nice” and seemed willing to help if she asked. But the pervasive norms of privacy and autonomy and the structure of the demanding schedule discouraged the kind of assistance that she needed as a new teacher: “Once the door locks, everybody’s in charge of their own classes . . . and the pace . . . doesn’t allow any kind of interaction at all.” Ranya described the professional isolation she encountered: “Even the person that taught the course, Earth Science, pretty much is on his own unless I seek him out . . . So, he’s helpful if you go talk to him, but he won’t seek you out.” A new teacher, she said, needs to “actually step out” and ask for help in this culture that fosters isolation and discourages interaction.

Donnell, who taught fourth grade in a large, urban school, was able to “step out” and ask for help, but he still found himself frustrated that he must



figure out so much on his own. Referring to experienced teachers and administrators, he explained, "They assume that first-year teachers know a lot of things." When he found an inventory sheet in his mailbox and had no idea what to do with it, he was left wondering "what am I going to do? Do I do it now? Do I do it at the end of the year? What do I do with that?" His colleague, Amy, recalled that she, too, was confused by all the paperwork and school procedures. But more important, she went through a good part of her first year unable to communicate with the non-English-speaking parents of many of her students, because no one ever told her that she had access to a translator. She echoed a comment voiced repeatedly by new teachers seeking to find their way in veteran-oriented cultures: "Everyone is willing to help, but I don't even know the questions to ask. So, how can they help me if I don't know what I am supposed to be asking for help with?"

### **Organized Support**

The professional cultures we identified as veteran-oriented had few meaningful structural mechanisms in place to orient, induct, and provide ongoing support for new teachers. Orientation programs, when they existed, were said to be brief and superficial, a fact that surprised and troubled many novices, particularly mid-career entrants who had worked in other professional settings where such programs were well organized and comprehensive. Robert, a former lawyer who was working in a suburban high school, called his orientation program "a joke." Keisha, a second-grade teacher in an urban school that offered no orientation, was similarly disappointed. She had expected a program, "much like in normal industry," that would acquaint her with "the expectations of the building." Instead, she found herself having to learn things "as they kind of trickle down." Esther, an experienced engineer who taught in an urban high school, described her district's orientation program as "an indoctrination to the [district] . . . to the union. We got all that stuff. They talked about benefits and health care." But at her school site, there was nothing: "Here, it's pretty much 'there's your classroom. Here's your book. Good luck.'"

*Mentoring and observation.* New teachers hope to learn about the craft of teaching from their experienced colleagues. Mentoring programs, in which expert teachers are assigned and sometimes paid to advise their new colleagues, are structures meant to develop new teachers and to strengthen and transfer culture. They existed at many of the schools we studied, but rarely did new teachers working in veteran-oriented cultures say that these arrangements were effective, and most found them deeply disappointing. Some re-

ported meeting with their assigned mentors only once at the beginning of the year. In a number of instances, assigned mentors worked in different schools and were inaccessible, or they taught different subjects or grade levels and were uninformed about the instructional issues that new teachers most wanted to discuss. In the worst cases of administrative disregard, respondents submitted repeated requests for a mentor that were never answered. Miriam, a mid-career entrant, submitted a form requesting a mentor at her district's orientation meeting. She followed that up with a phone call to the district office, then she asked the principal, and eventually she requested a mentor from her superintendent. By January, when she still did not have a mentor, she said, "At this point, I would like some support, a lot. I would like somebody who is supportive that I didn't feel like was going to get me fired."

Other new teachers echoed Miriam's desire for a mentor in a supportive role. Ranya's assigned mentor was also her department head, who explained that he was not permitted to give feedback about her teaching unless he formally evaluated her, and so she remained unobserved. Katie's assigned mentor missed the first several weeks of school, and arrangements were never made for someone else to step in. Amy's mentor was helpful in telling her how to get supplies on the first day of school, but when the mentor was reassigned to an administrative position soon after, Amy decided to have no mentor rather than work with the one mentor available in the school, a teacher whom she disliked. Esther's assigned mentor was a special education teacher who knew little about the mathematics Esther teaches:

I've spoken to this lady twice, maybe for 5 minutes . . . She's very nice and stuff, but she kind of goes by and kind of gives me a worried look [and says], "How's it going?" I say, "Okay." And then, that's it.

Angela's mentor stood as the exception. She answered questions about logistics and pedagogy, observed Angela teach and offered feedback, and covered Angela's classes so that she could observe others teach. This is the very sort of consistent mentoring that most of our respondents working in veteran-oriented schools yearned for but did not receive.

*Meeting with colleagues.* Novice teachers also look to meetings as an occasion for learning about their school and work, although, in veteran-oriented cultures, new teachers said that meeting time was seldom organized with the needs of new teachers in mind. Rather than providing the opportunity for novices to learn from their experienced colleagues or work through the puzzles of their practice, meeting time in veteran-oriented schools seemed to the

novices to be designed to allow administrators to disseminate information efficiently and conclude as quickly as possible.

Robert said that there is no time for collaboration at his department meetings, which the chair runs: "He comes with an agenda," which is largely administrative. Amy said that a number of her grade-level meetings had been canceled, and the ones that were held were generally unproductive or mostly procedural:

When I went for my interview, I spoke with the principal, and she was telling me all about these meetings that we would have every other week with the other teachers in our grade, because there are six in each grade. And they are nothing of what I expected. I expected us to go back and forth about ideas of how to teach this and how to teach that . . . I expected it to be more of a collaboration.

### **Coping in a Veteran-Oriented Professional Culture**

How do new teachers cope when there is no organized and sustained effort to orient them, mentor them, or structure meeting time for them to work together? Many, like Katie, operated on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Although she had never watched other teachers teach, she did manage to seek out and ask advice of her busy colleagues. She said that she could get answers when she pursued them, but even the physical layout of the building made it hard to find the teachers she needed. Often, she waited until the school day was over: "People do stay after school, but you need to grab them while you can, because they've got things they need to do."

Many respondents who found no organized support began to work informally with another colleague, often a teacher who was only slightly more experienced. Amy described her good fortune in finding a collaborative colleague:

I was lucky enough that there is another second-grade teacher that I talk to a lot, and she is young as well. And we combine our classes, and we do all kinds of things together. So, I was really lucky to find her . . . I just happened . . . upon her . . . It was during Thanksgiving time . . . and there was no social studies curriculum . . . so we both combined together. We had our own Thanksgiving dinner with both classes in one room, and we have tiny rooms. But it was great. It was nice to have someone on the same wavelength.

It is not uncommon for new teachers to gravitate toward each other and, when there is a critical number of them, to form a novice-oriented subculture that is at odds with the dominant veteran-oriented culture. Despite the benefits of such collaboration, Amy likely could have learned more from an expert

teacher who would have observed her classes, offered suggestions, and modeled the pedagogy of a master teacher. She said, "I am really learning the ropes myself." Given that, she was glad to have a closed classroom: "If I mess up, no one will know." With so little guidance and constructive feedback, and with so little structured opportunity for learning from master teachers, it is not surprising that some novice teachers working in schools with strong norms of privacy and autonomy find comfort in concealing their own practice. Ranya, also on her own, coped by figuring out everything by herself, from how to give homework to how to create or find tests. And although Donnell was observed by many people—the vice principals, his assigned mentor, and even other teachers in his grade level—he said he always got the same feedback: "You're fine." But if he was to grow as a teacher, this novice knew he needed a more critical, thoughtful, and constructive response to his teaching. He lamented, "I can't be that fine. This is my 1st [year]."

#### **NOVICE-ORIENTED PROFESSIONAL CULTURES**

Sarah was in her second year teaching middle-school Spanish in a charter school of which she was proud, working with a staff that she "loves." She said the teachers "can kind of lose themselves in [this school]" and then added, "It's wonderful to be lost in [this school]." She described a professional culture that is fast paced, exciting, exhausting, and innovative; she spoke of teachers who are energetic and committed but also tired and unguided. Despite the excitement that Sarah found at her school, she felt the pressure of having to be an expert in only her second year. High turnover made her one of the more senior members of the faculty, but she found herself pleading, "I am still a 'baby teacher.' Nobody can tell me that I'm not new anymore. I'm still new. I feared that if people considered me not a new teacher anymore, . . . I wouldn't have the flexibility to make mistakes."

Sarah worked in a school we characterize as having a novice-oriented professional culture. She enjoyed being in a vivacious workplace with a start-up flavor but was troubled by the alarming dearth of expertise. She and her inexperienced colleagues were on their own, early in their careers, struggling to master the complex craft of teaching and curriculum development. Because of its characteristically youth-oriented mentality and unseasoned staff, the professional culture of this school was typified not only by deep commitment and enthusiasm for the work but also by long hours, experimentation, high turnover, and frenzy.

### **On Being a New Teacher in a Novice-Oriented Professional Culture**

Some of the novice-oriented professional cultures described by our respondents were in schools that were open, democratic, and consensus driven, whereas others were rigid, rule oriented, and run from the top. Our sample included, among others, a failed neighborhood school working to renew itself, a charter school run by a corporation, and a community-based charter school with a participatory governance structure. Whatever the history and mission, our respondents described teachers within the staffs of these novice-oriented professional cultures who were determined to do what it would take for the school to succeed. Abe, a high-school science teacher at a suburban charter school, spoke of an “implicit desire to make the school work, because you believe in what it’s trying to do.” With inadequate training and often inadequate resources, new teachers were charged with realizing these schools’ missions unassisted by the wisdom or guidance of veteran teachers with proven expertise.

Because the large majority of teachers in novice-oriented cultures are inexperienced and young, novices have no special status and no sheltered opportunities to master their craft under expert supervision. Experienced professionals either do not exist in these schools, or they work in isolation, with no links to their novice colleagues. Sarah’s school put a premium on “faculty collaboration” and “high standards for students,” but it was unclear that these could be achieved with the mere good intentions and instincts of a transient, youthful, and inexperienced teacher community.

Gwen and Mike taught in an urban elementary school where Gwen estimated that 75% of the teachers were in their 20s. Unlike Sarah’s charter school, this was a conventional public school. Repeated turnover ensured that the school was perpetually staffed by inexperienced teachers. The youthful teachers enjoyed socializing with their age-alike peers, who were said to work at a breakneck pace. Gwen reported that she enjoyed “a place where a lot of people my own age are teaching, and a lot of people are fresh out of college, whether it’s undergrad or graduate school.” There was a sense that these new teachers were united by a seriousness of purpose and by a commitment to each other and their students. Mike described it as a “Peace Corps kind of thing,” where resources were limited but where “we make do with what we have.” However, teacher turnover in only 1 year was reportedly 60%, and Gwen saw early burnout among these novice teachers as a looming problem.

April taught writing as part of a middle-school team in a kindergarten through 12th-grade urban school serving more than 1,000 students. Like the

school where Mike and Gwen taught, April's grade level experienced tremendous staff turnover in a year, leaving her, a new teacher, with insufficient access to colleagues who were either experts in the classroom or knowledgeable about the ways of her school. She explained,

At the advanced level, we have basically almost an entirely new staff. So . . . we don't have many resources to go to and ask, "How did you do this last year?," because a lot of the people weren't here last year.

She said she "loves" the people she works with, but with more than half the year gone, she had only just begun to move from going home "frustrated" and "emotionally exhausted" every day to going home feeling like she was "getting stuff accomplished."

### Organized Support

Although new teachers in veteran-oriented cultures described sometimes feeling isolated as beginners, new teachers in novice-oriented cultures reported being surrounded by colleagues like themselves. They were not alone, but they often felt lost. When they said that they felt "supported" in their work, further comments usually revealed that they meant that other teachers in the school treated them "warmly," with "trust" and "respect," or offered "encouragement." Respondents rarely meant that they received steady assistance in learning to teach. For example, Mike said that "the lead teachers are excellent. And so, one has faith in them, and one feels their support." But then he went on to explain that organized support was "minimal" and that what passed for support was actually monitoring and evaluation, which Mike did not find supportive at all.

*Mentoring.* Predictably, schools staffed mostly by inexperienced teachers have great difficulty providing adequate mentoring for new teachers. Gwen was assigned a mentor, but she estimated that he was expected to follow the work of approximately 15 teachers. When she and her mentor did meet, Gwen found that they did not deal with the substantive, long-term issues of her professional development but focused on moment-to-moment crises: "It wasn't, 'Will you look at my lesson plan to see if it is okay?' It's like, 'I have a kid screaming at the top of his lungs. What should I do about this?'" Mike was also assigned a mentor, "a seasoned teacher in the system," with whom he was supposed to meet every 2 weeks. However, not only was the mentor at another school and, therefore, unable to observe him, but also the meetings they held were not helpful. Mike reported, "[T]he mentor essentially uses the time

to complain about her lot in life, and I am required to attend these meetings. So, the support is kind of laughable.”

Abe said that he did not have “nearly enough contact” with his assigned mentor, so when he wondered about a student or a lesson, he tried “to get around and make contact with as many people as possible.” He did see his mentor once a day, as they passed in the hall and exchanged promises about visiting each other’s classes. But Abe began to rely informally on the advice of other new teachers, “who ha[d] been at the [school] for a while more [than he had],” to support him in his work with students. April, in addition to being in a grade level that was plagued with high turnover, reported having very little contact with her assigned mentor. She explained how hard it was to cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships:

Most new teachers have a mentor assigned to them. And I’m not really sure what their role is, because I haven’t seen mine often, maybe two or three times for very brief periods of time. And some of that is scheduling, because the scheduling here is a little crazy. But I do wish I had more support, as far as my mentor goes, because she’s in my discipline. So, I kind of wish I was getting a little more support that way. But I don’t even really have time to let her know that, because I’m just so bogged down with all other kinds of things.

Like many of the other teachers in both veteran-oriented and novice-oriented professional cultures, Gwen summoned the informal support of her peers in nearby classrooms. She reported talking with them “all of the time,” asking, “Oh, what are you doing in this? Do you think this would work? What do you think about the [state-mandated] test?” Although the support she got came from other inexperienced teachers, she relied on it out of necessity. However, she stated that she still would like expert advice, particularly about classroom management, an aspect of teaching that novice teachers routinely find challenging.

*Meetings with colleagues.* Teachers in novice-oriented cultures usually reported meeting with their peers either too often or too rarely. Teachers in small, democratic charter schools typically processed all decisions together, often meeting several times a week. In contrast, larger, conventional schools with many novice teachers tended to hold brief, informational meetings that sounded much like those in schools described as having veteran-oriented cultures.

In meetings at Abe and Sarah’s charter school, administrators and teachers raised grand issues of pedagogy and curriculum, which too often left the new teachers feeling at a loss. Abe explained,

There are faculty meetings where we all kind of mull around issues, and they're sort of very democratic and very based on community and consensus, which can get a bit tough after a while. It's like, "Come on. Just make a decision." But it's also nice for building a sense of community and getting to know the other teachers.

In contrast, Mike estimated that his school held meetings "approximately once per month, which are business and have really little to do with ideas." Gwen, who taught with Mike, reported that staff meetings had no agenda. The message was "here are some things you need to know about . . . It's just kind of . . . a hodgepodge of things to discuss." Gwen also attended a voluntary, weekly meeting during her preparation period where, she said,

we just discuss what [we] are doing in social studies, what we [are] doing in the different types of areas . . . and basically that's just a sharing time . . . I go to them because it's nice to talk to people. It's also nice to complain about certain things to people.

Although these meetings might serve an important social purpose and allow for the exchange of information, they reportedly did little to help novice teachers develop an understanding of school-wide purposes and plans for improvement.

### **Coping in a Novice-Oriented Professional Culture**

Despite enjoying what one respondent described as "a wonderful sense of community," new teachers in novice-oriented cultures often said that they were unsure about what they should be doing and how well they were doing it. Gwen described the early months in her new school when

we did not have a lot of books . . . [and] the curriculum was kind of a mess. We would get September and October's curriculum in October . . . We were kind of lost at sea without any map or anything, without an astronomer to figure out where you were going.

In Sarah and Abe's charter school, there was a drive to be innovative, which sometimes made them feel that they were inventing something that must already exist somewhere else. They coped by working hard and by working long hours. The work was marked by loneliness and took place in an atmosphere that Sarah described as "incredibly competitive." Young teach-



ers, she said, watched to see “who put in the most hours. Who’s been here since midnight? Who spent the entire weekend assessing papers?”

During her first year, Gwen said, she never went to lunch. “I never felt prepared enough to leave my classroom, even when the kids weren’t there.” A year later, she viewed the current first-year teachers with empathy:

I think those teachers that don’t go to lunch and that don’t talk to others are teachers who are really having a lot of problems and don’t want other people to really know about it or see it on their face, because they want . . . to be successful. I didn’t want people to know that I felt like I was failing. So, I think they kind of avoid [talking] about it, because they don’t want a stigma attached to them, which did happen with some teachers last year. And they are no longer here, because they reached out [and] . . . they were slapped in the face.

Clearly, Gwen saw there was no mechanism in the professional culture of this school to mentor, support, or advise the teachers to which she referred, who were eventually fired. Gwen said that she got the message loud and clear: “Don’t call down to the office; don’t reach out for help to certain people, because they won’t do anything but make your life miserable.”

We do not intend to detract from the heartfelt enthusiasm with which many teachers in these novice cultures referred to their schools or clusters as “family,” “team,” and “community.” To Abe, it was a “culture built on understanding . . . and mutual respect,” and “part of the job . . . [is an] implicit responsibility you feel . . . to make the school sustainable and build it into something that’s going to last beyond your tenure here.” Gwen felt like she was “part of a community.” She liked being an “equal” with younger teachers. But these new teachers also described the formidable challenge of educating students and building or reforming a school with a staff of earnest but inexperienced teachers.

## INTEGRATED PROFESSIONAL CULTURES

Valerie taught kindergarten in a recently renovated and expanded suburban elementary school where, she said, “the camaraderie amongst the teachers is amazing.” When she talked about “teamwork,” she talked about the norm that supported teachers always “going in and out” of each other’s classes. This classroom openness was so widely practiced, Valerie said, that if another teacher came into her room, she did not think the “kids would even think twice.” She described the excellent support she received. When Valerie faced challenges with a particular student, she convened the “teacher

assistance team,” where she had easy access to professional conversations about strategies for working with a particular child and “changing what [she was] doing in the classroom.” She readily got the support that she said she needs, but she was also considered a valuable, albeit novice, member of the faculty. She said the veteran teachers “treat us like we have been here just as long as they have.”

### **On Being a New Teacher in an Integrated Professional Culture**

In the professional cultures we characterized as integrated, respondents described schools organized so that teachers could realize their strongly held beliefs about the importance of collegiality. Communication and cooperation in the service of improving instruction were the norm, and teachers shared a collective responsibility for educating all students. These professional cultures were attentive to what novice teachers knew and what they needed to know, and there was open and reciprocal exchange between the fresh perspectives of the novice teachers and the wisdom of their experienced colleagues. In addition, in integrated professional cultures, teachers could influence the practices in their schools, and they were dedicated to their own professional growth and renewal, so that their practices were flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of their students.

Tanya felt “lucky” to be teaching second grade in a small elementary school. Although most of the teachers in her school were veterans—Tanya and another first-year teacher were the only ones younger than 30 years old—she did not describe this as a veteran-oriented culture. The experienced teachers made concerted efforts to orient and assist the novice teachers while remaining open to new ways of doing their own work. Tanya described the faculty as “caring,” “compassionate,” and “wonderful.” The veterans, she said, “know what they are doing” and were “really supportive of me.” She estimated,

I have 10 or 15 people that go out of their way to make sure I am comfortable and make sure I know what I’m doing. I can go to [them] and say, “Oh god, I messed up. What do I do?”

But more important, Tanya said her special status as a novice was recognized. At her job interview, Tanya recalled her principal saying, “You are a first year teacher; you are going to fall on your face. That’s okay.” Consequently, Tanya went to the principal for advice, support, and mentoring. When she reported a mishap in a lesson or with a student, the principal responded by say-

ing either, "Okay, here is what we are going to do," or by asking, "What do you think about this?"

What seemed so distinctive about integrated professional cultures described by respondents such as Valerie and Tanya was that the classroom openness, the support for teachers, and the communication among them extended throughout the team, department, or school. In integrated cultures, the organized structures for support, the norms for how work gets done, and the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about collegiality and professional growth were embedded in the school's professional culture. New teachers in integrated professional cultures said that they and their colleagues characteristically exhibited a collective responsibility for the students and the school community. As Fred, a middle-school social studies teacher in a small, urban, neighborhood school explained, "I'm not primarily a social studies teacher here; I'm a teacher here primarily." By this, he meant that it was "[his] responsibility, as it is everybody else's, to share in the burden" of educating the school's students.

### **Organized Support for Improving Teaching**

The organization of integrated professional cultures enables teachers, both novice and experienced, to be successful in their work. Becky and Steve taught in a small, suburban middle school, which Becky said was "very uplifting" and Steve called "wonderful." According to Becky, the school had a "school-wide culture of teaming," supported by common planning time of three blocks each week to ensure that team teaching could happen. In Lori's elementary school, which functioned as a professional development school with a local university, there was "a lot of grade-specific collaboration," and special schedules enabled teachers to regularly "meet with each other, plan, or share ideas." Thus, the shared belief that teaming is a good professional practice was supported by a staffing schedule that enabled teachers to collaborate. Common planning time, in which all teachers participate, was characteristic of the integrated professional cultures described by new teachers in this study.

Becky's classroom doors were never shut and "neither [were] anyone else's." She described the teachers' ongoing contact in this school, where they were expected to communicate constantly and to see themselves as collectively responsible for the education of the school's students:

I would say [I have contact with other teachers] every half an hour, if it's not just walking by in the hall and saying, "How are you doing today?," [it is] a

meeting once a day at least, whether it's for 15 minutes or [the] 2-hour meeting that we're going to have this afternoon with all of the other teachers. But there is [always] some type of planning session, work session, discussion, [or] checking in with whomever it is. It happens constantly.

Like Becky, Fred also saw all the teachers in his school "constantly having interactions" about kids and about course content. He reported that there was "collegiality here," which he attributed to a genuine belief that the teachers were "all in the same game."

Steve reported a similar experience, having found that "the teachers themselves just go out of their way to help me improve my class so that the school itself is a better learning environment" for all students. He spoke disparagingly about other schools where he imagined that teachers shared the view, "Don't worry about my class, and I won't worry about your class." Steve experienced the teachers' work as a "group effort," where everybody was "very much a team player." He liked working in an organization where people believed "we're here to make this successful no matter what it takes," and he appreciated having experienced colleagues who could guide the way.

*The example of mentoring.* New teachers who worked in what we called integrated professional cultures described markedly different experiences with mentoring than did our respondents in veteran-oriented and novice-oriented cultures. Tanya described a reciprocal relationship with her mentor, the other second grade teacher:

Officially, we have a 1-hour meeting once a week. But I talk to her all day, every day . . . I am supposed to come to her and say, "This is what happened this week that I don't know how to deal with," or, "This is what happened that I am so upset about." . . . We have done lots of plans together. We have sort of reviewed what we're going to do. She has been really supportive in bringing me back. It's this weird mix of all of these idealistic, theoretical ideas and then the real life. I have much more theory and idealism than she does, but she has a lot more real life than I do. So we . . . work together and make it work.

Valerie described how her mentor, a 20-year veteran at her school, took on the role of "bringing those codes down to [the rest of the teachers] and saying, 'This is how we do it.'" She, and other veterans, took responsibility for transmitting the school's cultural norms and expectations to the next generation of teachers. Valerie's principal led monthly meetings with the new teachers and their mentors where they "bring up concerns that [they] are having or things that [they] think would be beneficial for change." It was out of one of these

meetings that a new approach to report cards evolved. Unlike Sarah, the “baby teacher” forced to raise and nurture herself in a novice-oriented culture, Valerie said that her mentor “brought me up. That’s the way it is.”

### **Integrated Cultures: Links Between the Novices and Experts**

The example of Tanya’s mentoring relationship described above illustrates another critical element of integrated professional cultures. In these cultures, veteran teachers and novice teachers do not exist on separate, parallel planes; instead, there are meaningful and plentiful places where their worlds of work are deliberately arranged to intersect: within the context of mentoring, in common planning time, in collaborative efforts to strengthen the school, and in their common quest to improve their practice.

Lori found that being involved in different educational initiatives at the school allowed her to discuss constantly what she was doing, which she saw as critical:

I have my own ideas behind doing things. They may be very good ideas, but it is the sharing that helps me understand my ideas, I think. It helps me develop them and really get a grasp on where I’m coming from. Maybe, see other things I didn’t see . . . [It] helps me do my job. Period. I just can’t imagine doing it any other way.

It is instructive to contrast Lori’s experience with Rachel’s, the kindergarten teacher described earlier who worked in the veteran-oriented culture and who was excluded from the deliberations about full-day kindergarten. Not only did Rachel go unrecognized for her expertise or her stake in decisions made about the kindergarten, but also she missed valuable opportunities to work closely with colleagues about an important educational issue.

In another integrated professional culture, Becky worked with her team teacher in an interdependent relationship that she said was typical of her school’s faculty. She learned from a more experienced teacher, staying “in sync” with her curriculum planning; otherwise, she said, “my job would be 20 times harder.” But Becky said that her teammate learned from her as well: “I think it goes the other way, too.” Similarly, Fred described the interaction between the youthful novices and seasoned veterans in his school: The new teachers “learn from the veteran teachers,” and the veteran teachers “get sparked a little bit from the young teachers coming in.”

### **Teacher Renewal and Professional Growth**

In Lori's school, as in other schools said to have integrated professional cultures, there was a strong emphasis on all teachers "renewing" their practice. Lori described the faculty at her school as "older, middle-aged teachers," but, she emphasized, "they're not still teaching like they did 20 years ago." The school is organized around the idea that "you are constantly learning yourself . . . and then taking what you learn and applying it to your teaching." All teachers were expected to be committed to their own professional development, and because they were involved in so many aspects of the educational program at the school, "their practice is always being renewed." She said that this norm was so strong school-wide that she "can't think of anyone there who is simply going through the motions, as far as doing what they did last year because last year it worked." We typically found that in schools with what seemed to be integrated professional cultures, teachers were always learners, steadily improving their practice, but that their improvements and innovations were bounded and directed rather than frenetic and unguided, as they seemed to be in the novice-oriented cultures previously described.

### **THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE**

Principals regularly emerged as central figures in our respondents' accounts, in some cases meeting, even exceeding, the novices' expectations for guidance and support; in others disappointing them day to day; or in the extreme, diminishing their hopes about a career in teaching. The teachers' words about the principals they regarded as exemplary could be drawn from a textbook list of leadership traits: "visible," "encouraging," "has high standards," "sets clear expectations," "consistent with discipline," "supportive," and "collaborative." But when we looked closely at the responses of teachers who worked in different types of professional cultures, we found important patterns in what they said their principals did.

In veteran-oriented and novice-oriented cultures, respondents did not describe principals trying to establish a place for new teachers within the professional culture of the school. In contrast, the principals of schools that we identified as having integrated professional cultures were actively building and/or tending those cultures, with particular attention to the needs of new teachers. This trend among principals in schools with integrated cultures confirms the work of Talbert and McLaughlin (1996), who argued for the importance of school leadership in developing and sustaining professional

cultures in schools. They pointed to how principals and other school leaders can “enable teacher community” by providing structures for collegial interaction, “authorizing . . . teacher responsibility for good professional practice” (p. 145) and providing opportunities for professional growth. The principals in the integrated professional cultures understood the challenges of being a novice, and they used their role as a principal and their skill as a leader to shape or sustain the culture with those needs in mind. Overall, respondents said that the principals of schools with integrated professional cultures were actively present and responsive in the school; they focused on instructional issues and organized support for professional growth, and they purposefully promoted teamwork toward instructional improvement within the school.

### **Present and Responsive**

New teachers in veteran-oriented and novice-oriented cultures often said that their principals were absent from the daily life of their schools. Amy said her principal was “never there.” Ranya explained that hers was “doing all kinds of administrative stuff” that took him out of the school. In some cases, the principal withdrew to his office, having ceded control of the professional culture to the veterans. When that happened, new teachers said they were usually excluded from the established social order. Sometimes, when respondents said that a principal in veteran-oriented or novice-oriented schools was “visible,” further comments revealed that these administrators were seen to be moving brusquely through hallways or “popping into classrooms” but more as a monitor or symbol of authority than as a participant or fellow educator. Amanda, who found her principal intimidating, said, “Her policy is no news is good news. If she doesn’t have to speak to you, everything is okay. Not great, just okay.”

In novice-oriented schools, principals said to be visible sometimes relied on a top-down management style and treated new teachers like underlings to be monitored rather than as new colleagues to be welcomed and supported. New teachers often acknowledged the many demands that preoccupied their principals, but they regretted their absence nonetheless. April said, “I don’t think the administration has time to come around and even say, ‘How’s it going?’” Teachers in charter schools realized that their principals had to be publicly active, raising funds and building support for the school, but they often wished that they, as new teachers, did not have to pay the price. Mary, a seventh-grade humanities teacher within an in-district charter school said, “He does what a principal does when you start a school . . . My principal is an entrepreneur. I don’t need an entrepreneur . . . although he’s doing what he should. Day to day for me, it makes it hard.”

In contrast, new teachers in schools with integrated professional cultures described their principals as present and engaged in the daily life of the school. The new teachers appreciated their attention and support. According to Valerie, her principal often said, "If you have any questions, any concerns, anything that you want to do, bring it up . . . [we will] look into it." Becky described her principal as "very hands on, very into it, finding out what's happening with everyone." Fred described his principal as a "leader," an "innovator," and an "example."

### **Focused on Improving Teaching and Learning**

In integrated professional cultures, new teachers described both experienced and inexperienced faculty members as engaged in efforts to grow professionally. New teachers, whose greatest hopes and fears centered on their own instructional success or failure, wanted to have someone observe them teaching and offer constructive feedback. They counted on the principal either to arrange such support or to personally provide it. In the best situations, principals paired new teachers with mentors who taught the same subject or grade level, who were easily accessible in the school, and who understood how their roles as mentors contributed not only to the improvement of the new teacher's practice but also to their own professional development and to the school's improvement. In Fred's school there was an expectation "that you learn from your fellow teachers." When asked the source of that expectation, he said that the principal "exemplifies" it by her frequent visits to classrooms, conveying to the staff "that that's an important thing to do." Valerie's principal supported the mentoring program in her school by regularly convening the group of mentors and novices in discussions about what they were learning and how the process might be improved.

When a school has few new teachers, the principal can regularly observe and assist them, and, if that principal is skilled in pedagogy and mentoring, the new teacher will be well served. Tanya, whose principal visited her class often, said, "She's in my room all the time, and I like that. She'll say, 'Next time, try this.'" However, the repeated lament from new teachers in schools with veteran-oriented or novice-oriented cultures was that no one, beyond their students, watched them teach. Rachel, whose assigned mentor taught in another school and never came to her class, believed that her principal should have observed her regularly, "at least once a month," and that if he were not so "very busy," he could have been very helpful: "He's wonderful. He used to be a third-grade teacher. So, he's been there."



### **Focused on Organizing Collaboration and Teamwork**

It is axiomatic in this era of school reform that meaningful school improvement requires teamwork, although interdependent relations among groups of teachers actually are not the norm. "Real collegiality," as described by Little (1990b), was most evident in the schools that we have identified as having integrated professional cultures, and new teachers credited principals with making it work. In Becky and Steve's school, the principal organized teachers to plan together and to revise the curriculum. As Steve explained, participating in this effort was "a mindset that the whole faculty have." Tanya reported that the professional norms and expectations in her school had most often come from the experienced teachers, but the principal, who had been in the school only 2 years, participated actively with teachers in defining and perpetuating these values and habits of practice.

Often in veteran-oriented schools, novice teachers reported that they were excluded or overlooked by the principal and, thus, by experienced teachers as well. Miriam, a mid-career entrant in a veteran-oriented school, suggested that there was some risk in asking for help: "Where it's my first year, the less support I need the better. If I need a lot of support, I probably won't be rehired." Rachel said that her veteran colleagues made informal decisions about how the school would work, but she had no access to any process of planning or governance. Among the many novice teachers in start-up schools, there was an intense sense of camaraderie, but often their enthusiasm did not translate into an organized professional effort. New teachers were left adrift, largely because they lacked sustained access to the expertise of accomplished teachers and to the attentive leadership of principals.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Those new teachers in our study who found themselves in what we came to call veteran-oriented cultures discovered that they were largely ignored or kept at the edge of the dominant culture of their school, a culture shaped by and oriented toward experienced teachers. Such schools lacked the norms and structures needed to support new teachers in their development from neophytes to experts. When these teachers had questions about curriculum, pedagogy, or child development, they could not talk with or observe the skilled teachers whose practices they might admire. Although they worked in the midst of a potentially resourceful faculty, rich with experience, the new teachers said that they were often professionally alone.

What might this mean for students? First, there is the obvious fact that, in these settings, new teachers' skills and expertise are largely limited to what they know on arrival or what they might learn in the often costly process of trial and error. Thus, the school squanders its resources, missing the chance to build professional capacity that could ultimately serve all students. Second, these new teachers quickly realize that their colleagues and principal largely ignore what they do as teachers in the classroom, except insofar as they maintain order so that the new teachers' students will not disrupt the veterans' teaching. Some respondents in veteran-oriented schools had been told to concentrate on discipline and classroom management during their first year and not to focus on teaching until their second year. Although their instructional efforts are ignored, novices frequently find that their more superficial responsibilities—meeting paperwork deadlines, arriving at hall duty, walking students silently to lunch—receive close scrutiny. Discipline and order often become more important than teaching and learning, surely to the detriment of students and likely to the detriment of teachers' enthusiasm and idealism.

New teachers who found themselves in novice-oriented cultures also were insufficiently supported in their development as teachers. The professional cultures of these schools were often driven by strong ideology and enthusiasm but were devoid of expert judgment and skilled practice. These new teachers rarely found themselves in roles that were appropriate for fledgling teachers. They could not experiment with lessons, group work, or assignments with the support and critique of a responsible and trusted expert. Instead, they seemed to be caught in a perpetual cycle of excessive rediscovery and reinvention. The inevitable mistakes they made and failures they encountered happened without knowledgeable colleagues to help them reflect on their experience and strategize plans for the next day.

Students, of course, are in the classrooms during this first year of a teacher's experimentation and lonely struggle. New teachers in novice-oriented cultures often assume the monstrous and solitary task of developing curricula from scratch (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, in press), trying to improve their teaching practice and trying to fulfill their other responsibilities in the school. As a result, a teacher's attention shifts away from a carefully designed teaching plan to day-to-day survival. Although students sometimes appreciate these earnest and often frantic efforts, and although students may forge meaningful relationships with these new teachers, students would benefit from teachers who are more purposefully and meaningfully supported in their professional work. Neither the veteran-oriented nor the novice-oriented

culture offers the novice teacher special status and responsibilities appropriate to his or her needs as a beginner.

*Formal structures and embedded values.* When new teachers were inducted into and socialized by integrated professional cultures, there were organizational structures such as mentoring arrangements and curriculum-planning sessions that supported their induction. These new teachers spoke of being united with their colleagues in the pursuit of a common mission. Such shared purpose had not emerged accidentally or spontaneously but had been deliberately built. By contrast, when schools with veteran-oriented cultures attempted to address the special needs of novice teachers, they did so with inadequate formal structures or ones that were devoid of deeply held norms and values. Mentors were mechanically assigned, apparently with little or no effort to make a good match. Meetings were said to be infrequent and perfunctory, with no expectation that they would deal with important topics or engage teachers in collaborative work. Novice-oriented cultures, in all their uncertainty, often relied for survival on strong ideology and norms of hard work. Yet, they too typically failed to use formal structures—orientation, mentoring, meaningful meetings—to support new teachers effectively.

This study, through which we identified three types of professional cultures as new teachers experience them, illuminates the need for both policy makers and practitioners to attend carefully to the design and implementation of formal induction and long-term support programs for new teachers. With the current teacher shortage, schools must develop a complex set of initiatives designed not only to recruit and hire strong teachers but also to provide ongoing induction and support so that those novice teachers succeed and stay. Any principal who believes that hiring good people is all that is needed is badly mistaken.

An integrated professional culture can have positive effects on student learning, novice teacher development and retention, and veteran teacher renewal. This joint endeavor, in which novice and veteran teachers embark together on the collective mission of educating all students in their school, calls for leadership by both the principal and teachers. This kind of leadership facilitates collaboration and teamwork, is supportive and embedded in the work and life of the school, and has as its primary focus the improvement of teaching and learning. It may well determine whether the next generation of teachers succeeds or fails in our nation's classrooms.

**APPENDIX**  
**Interview Protocol**

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1. Before I get into the specific questions, I would like to get a general sense of your experience. How is it going?
2. Has teaching been what you expected?
  - Why?
  - Why not?
  - What did you expect before you entered?
3. How would you describe your school—the people and programs—to someone who does not know it?
  - How many teachers teach here?
4. What is it like to teach here?
5. I understand that your assignment is to teach [subject, grade]. Beyond that, what other responsibilities do you have?
6. How did you decide to teach?
  - First career:
    - What other career options did you consider?
    - Did your parents influence you?
    - What do or did your parents do?
    - Why did you decide to reject those other careers?
  - Mid-career:
    - What did you do before you decided to teach?
    - Why did you decide to make the career change?
7. People come to teaching by different pathways. What type of teacher preparation have you had?
  - Are you certified by the state?
  - How did you come to teach at this school?
8. Can you describe the type of support you have received as a new teacher, either within the school or the district?
  - Did you have a mentor?
  - Is the support you received what you needed?
9. I am interested in the contact that you have on a regular basis with other teachers, both formal and informal.
  - Can you tell me how often you talk with other teachers, in what kinds of situations, and what you talk about?
  - Do you watch other teachers teach?
10. Is what you just described typical of other teachers in this school?
  - How would you characterize the way they work together?

11. Is there a common sense among teachers of what teachers in this school should do in their work? Are there certain norms and expectations?

Yes:

- Could you describe these norms and expectations?
- Where do these norms and expectations come from?
- How do you know or how did you learn what is expected of you?
- Do you share these norms and expectations?

No:

- Why do you think this is the case?
- Are there groups within the faculty that have certain norms and expectations?

12. How does it feel to be a member of this faculty?

13. Principals take on different roles in different schools. I am interested in understanding how you see your principal. What role would you say he or she plays?

Is this what you think a principal should do?

14. Do you have a curriculum that you are expected to follow?

Yes:

- What kinds of things does it specify (general goals, specific topics, specific lessons, how to use time)?
- In your view, is it a good curriculum?
- Why is it a good curriculum (depth, structure, support, ideas, resources, creativity, results, consistency)?
- Do you like using it?
- Does it work well for your students?
- Does anyone check to see that you are following the curriculum?
- Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom, and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?

No:

- How do you decide what to teach and how to teach?
- In your view, does this process of deciding what to teach and how to teach work well for you?
- Do you think this works well for your students?
- Does anyone monitor what you are teaching?
- Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom, and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?

15. Are there tests you are required to give to your students?

How closely are they tied to what you teach?

How are the results used?

Do the tests affect what and how you teach?

Does the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) affect what you teach and how you teach it?

16. Do you feel sufficiently prepared to teach in the way you are expected to teach here?  
Where do you go for information or advice about what and how to teach?
17. We are interested in incentives and rewards for teachers. What is your salary? How is it set?
- What benefits do you get?
  - Are there any other perks?
  - Was there any way to negotiate your salary when you started?
  - How are your raises determined?
  - Can you take on additional responsibilities for extra pay?
  - Do you?
  - Do you supplement your pay with additional work outside the school?
  - Can you cover your living expenses on what you make?
- Mid-career:
- How does your salary compare with what you made in the past?
- First career:
- How does your salary compare with what you would be making if you pursued your second-choice career?
18. What do you think of the idea of salary being based on performance?
19. Do you know anything about National Board certification?
- No:  
It is a national process of identifying master teachers and paying them more.  
What do you think about this?
- Yes:
- What do you think about this?
20. What do you think about the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program?  
Recipient:
- What would you have done if you had not received the bonus?
21. There have been some efforts to create a structure, sometimes called a “career ladder,” where a teacher would take on different responsibilities and earn more pay. Is that of interest to you?
22. Does teaching offer you a “good fit” as a career?
23. How long do you plan to stay in teaching?  
Will family influence your plans?  
If respondent plans to leave teaching:
- What would it take to keep you in teaching longer?
  - If a career ladder were in place, would that affect your decision to remain in teaching?
24. These are the four topics we are researching: teacher careers, professional culture, curriculum and assessment, and incentives and rewards. Given these topics, is there anything else that you would like to add?
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## NOTES

1. We note that there is considerable debate about the extent to which organizational structures merely reflect an existing organizational culture or to which they actually reinforce or reshape the existing organizational culture.

2. The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program recruits individuals who have never taught in public schools by offering an extra income of \$20,000 over the course of 4 years as well as a 6-week summer training program that leads to a provisional teaching certificate, the same credential held by graduates of teacher education programs.

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