

**The Role of Person-Organization Fit in
Early Elementary Teachers' Literacy Instruction**

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Schools and districts face many challenges with regard to the quality of new elementary teachers' reading and writing instruction. Many novice teachers struggle to integrate phonics, phonemic awareness, and other basic reading skills with strategies that promote reading for comprehension (Phelps & Schilling, 2004; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004). Further, beginning elementary teachers confront challenges to successfully develop and refine students' higher-order reading and writing skills (Hillocks, 2006) and discussion-based approaches to reading instruction (Applebee et al., 2003). In response to concerns about instructional quality, many districts and states have implemented induction programs for new teachers (Education Week, 2009). These programs typically feature formally assigned mentors, opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, orientation sessions, and workshops and seminars. Further, many districts offer professional development for novice and experienced teachers that addresses curriculum, instruction, and assessment in reading and writing.

With increased attention under *No Child Left Behind* to teachers' instructional practices and student performance, researchers and policy makers are strongly interested in how mentoring and other factors influence teachers' reading and writing instruction. Research on teacher cognition and sensemaking has helped explain how experienced teachers make sense of and respond to policies related to curriculum, assessment, and professional development (Coburn, 2001; Stein & Coburn, 2008; Stein & D'Amico, 2002). In particular, this line of research indicates that veteran teachers' learning and instruction are shaped by their backgrounds and prior experiences, their professional relations with colleagues, and whether districts establish environments that are conducive for teacher development and changes in practice.

It is less clear from extant research, though, how beginning teachers' instructional practices are influenced by mentors, colleagues, their own backgrounds, and district and state policies. A number of recent qualitative studies have suggested that mentors can promote new teacher learning by probing their thinking, helping them focus on students, utilizing knowledge of assessment, reframing novices' perspectives, and analyzing student work (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; 2001b). But a recent large-scale study conducted by Glazerman and colleagues (2008) has raised questions about the impact of intensive mentoring in urban districts on novices' language arts instructional practices.

How, then, might we explain the role of mentors and other factors in new elementary teachers' decisions regarding reading and writing instruction? What processes do novice teachers go through in making sense of district and state policies related to language arts curriculum,

instruction, and assessment and in negotiating relationships with mentors, colleagues, and school administrators? In this paper, we address these questions by drawing on the notion of person-organization (P-O) fit¹ (Kristof, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Wang & Odell, 2007; Zhao & Frank, 2003) and reporting on a qualitative study of seven beginning elementary teachers in two urban school districts in Michigan. The purpose of the study was twofold. First, we examined how variations in degree of P-O fit seemed to be associated with a) novices' professional relations with mentors, colleagues, and administrators; and b) the nature of their reading and writing instructional practices. Second, we considered how various factors seemed to contribute to the degree of P-O fit experienced by the beginning teachers in the study.

The first section of this paper reviews research on the role of mentors, colleagues, and P-O fit in new teacher induction. In the second section, we explain the notion of P-O fit and present our theoretical framework, which draws on recent research in education, economics, and organizational management. The third section describes our sample, research methods, and modes of analysis. Fourth, we present findings regarding how degree of P-O fit for the seven study participants seemed related to novices' professional relations and their reading and writing instruction. The fifth section considers how beginning teachers' professional beliefs, prior experiences, and school contexts shaped the degree of P-O fit that they experienced. Finally, the sixth section concludes by considering implications of this analysis for future research.

I. Research on Mentors, Colleague, and Degree of Person-Organization Fit

Some scholarship on mentoring has suggested characteristics of mentors and mentoring activities that may be associated with successful new teacher outcomes in diverse, urban contexts. For example, based on a synthesis of literature on effective urban teaching, Guyton and Hidalgo (1995) identified possible characteristics of effective urban mentors; such mentors are able to operate effectively in challenging bureaucracies, are focused on student learning as opposed to broader social change, have a strong sense of identity and strong interpersonal skills, and enact curricula that include a variety of cultural perspectives. More recently, empirical research by Kapadia, Coca, and Easton on first- and second-year teachers in Chicago found that novice elementary teachers receiving "strong" mentoring "were much more likely (than other novices) to report a good experience, intend to continue teaching, and plan to remain in the same school" (2007, p.28).² But what types of assistance with instruction, assessment, and student learning seem to be most meaningful for beginning teachers in urban settings? In the first part of this literature review, we consider several qualitative studies that have addressed this question.

In one study, Feiman-Nemser (2001b) examined how a veteran elementary teacher defined and carried out his role as a mentor and the strategies he used to promote new teacher development. His strategies included finding openings that could lead to productive conversation, identifying specific problems, probing novices' thinking, observing evidence of growth, demonstrating teaching techniques, focusing on students, and modeling reflective teaching. In a second study, Athanases and Achinstein (2003) investigated the frames (managerial, human resource, and political) used by mentors and beginning teachers to view linguistically and culturally diverse students and challenges of practice. Based on data from 15 elementary mentor-novice pairs, the researchers found that mentors used student observations, analyses of student work, and records of teacher-student interactions to help new teachers reframe their problems so that they were focused less on behavioral issues and more on the learning needs of diverse students (Athanases & Achinstein, 2004).

A third study, by Achinstein and Barrett (2004), explored strategies used by two mentors to focus beginning elementary teachers on the learning of individual and underperforming students. The mentors in this study worked with novices to activate knowledge of student and teacher learning and numerous domains of assessment; and they helped them enact pedagogical strategies based on their accumulated knowledge of students' needs and learning styles (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004). Finally, a fourth study, by Luft and Roehrig (2005), points to possible consequences when new teachers in diverse settings do not have access to mentoring or other forms of induction support. The researchers studied three beginning secondary science teachers and found that their enthusiasm for working in diverse, urban contexts did not result in the enactment of reform-oriented instruction. Because these novices had little knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds, they often taught their science units with little attention to the cultural relevance of their curriculum or instruction (Luft & Roehrig, 2005).

These studies provide some insight into effective mentoring practices in diverse, urban contexts, suggesting that mentors can promote student-centered instruction on the part of beginning teachers through a variety of strategies. These strategies include probing new teachers' thinking, focusing on students' diverse needs, reframing teachers' views, drawing on knowledge of assessment, and analyzing student learning. At the same time, it is less clear from these studies how colleagues, principals, and degree of person-organization fit seem to influence novices' instructional practices. Next, we review research on how beginning teachers' colleagues and administrators, along with their formally assigned mentors, can play an important role in their induction experiences.

In one study, Kardos and colleagues (Johnson & PNGT, 2004; Kardos et al., 2001) identified three types of professional cultures within schools with regard to new teacher induction: veteran-oriented cultures, novice-oriented cultures, and integrated professional cultures.³ The researchers found that beginning teachers in integrated professional cultures received sustained assistance and regularly interacted with colleagues across experience levels. The Kardos et al. (2001) study also indicated that principals can play an important role in developing integrated professional cultures where the unique needs of new teachers are recognized and met. In particular, the school leaders with integrated professional cultures were actively involved, responsive, and focused on improving instruction and student learning; and they promoted teacher collaboration (Kardos et al., 2001).

Research by Author (2007) considered how elementary principals' professional backgrounds and beliefs influenced their approach to supporting new teachers in urban contexts. Of the six principals in the study, the researcher found that three of the principals strongly promoted new teachers' instructional growth in direct interactions with them and by facilitating their work with mentors and grade-team members. In contrast, the other three school leaders had much less of a positive impact on new teacher development. The study provides evidence that the differences in novices' experiences seemed related to variations in the principals' professional backgrounds; their beliefs and actions regarding leadership, induction, and evaluation; and their responses to district and state policy. More specifically, principals with strong backgrounds in literacy, teacher assessment, and professional development were more likely to promote new teacher learning than school leaders with less knowledge in these areas (Author, 2007).

The studies by Kardos et al. (2001) and Author (2007) provide evidence that colleagues and principals can have important effects on beginning teachers. At the same time, these studies, along with the research reviewed earlier on mentoring, failed to consider the extent to which new teachers fit in or are aligned with their colleagues, principals, and/or school and district contexts. In recent years, researchers have begun to examine the extent to which and ways in which novice teachers experience person-organization fit in their schools and districts. In one study, Roehrig and Luft (2006) examined the effects of a science-focused induction program on 16 new secondary science teachers who had completed different teacher education programs. The researchers reported that the novices' pre-service training influenced the types of assistance they sought and took from the induction program. In particular, those teachers who had graduated from a preparation program with two science methods courses and an extended student teaching experience implemented more reform-based practices than the other teachers and indicated that they believed in the effectiveness of such practices (Roehrig & Luft, 2006).

In a second study, Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglmán (2004) showed how differences in two new teachers' characteristics, their degree of fit with mentors and colleagues, and their opportunities for collaboration seemed to influence their induction experiences. One beginning teacher, Liz, grew up in the urban district where she taught, attended a nearby large public university, and began teaching while she completed her certification. District A, where Liz worked, recruited teachers from the local community to reflect the population of the students. In contrast, the other novice in the study, Sam, was from an affluent community and had earned a teaching certificate at a research university. District B, where Sam worked, recruited teachers from such institutions who shared a teaching philosophy consistent with that of the district. Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglmán reported that "(t)he types of teachers employed by the two districts were the result of an interaction between the new teachers' backgrounds, which affected their educational and employment choices, and the districts' hiring practices" (2004, p.576).

Liz and Sam were each assigned a mentor during their first two years of teaching. Liz and her mentor addressed issues related to classroom management and parents more than instructional issues. While Liz's professional beliefs were aligned with those of her mentor, her mentor did not help her to reflect on or improve her teaching. Instead, the expectations placed on Liz by her mentor, colleagues, and district policy were to follow routines, curricula, and assessments designed by the state and district. Unlike Liz, Sam met weekly with his mentor to co-plan and reflect on reading and writing lessons. In Sam's case, interactions with his mentor and colleagues and district professional development allowed him to expand his instructional practice and grow as a teacher. His district expected teachers to develop as professionals with support from colleagues and the district, and Sam benefited from grade-team collaboration, support from a district instructional coach, and participating in an action research group (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglmán, 2004). In sum, in the cases of both Liz and Sam, there was a strong degree of fit between novice and their school and district contexts, but the consequences of having high levels of fit differed considerably for these two novices.

Looking across the studies reviewed here, it is clear from existing research that mentors can promote new teacher development in a variety of ways and that colleagues and principals can also influence novices' induction experiences. It is less evident, though, whether or how mentors, colleagues, and administrators shape beginning teachers' instructional practices. The study by Roehrig and Luft (2006) suggests that the degree of alignment between teachers' preparation experiences and district expectations can impact new secondary science teachers' instruction. Further, the Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglmán (2004) study indicates that degree of fit between novice and their mentor, colleagues, and district policy may be associated with patterns in new

elementary teachers' reading and writing instruction. But extant research does not account for variations among beginning elementary teachers' instructional practices when novices are working in the same or similar diverse, urban contexts.

II. Beginning Teachers' Sense of Person-Organization Fit

The theoretical framework employed in this study posits that beginning elementary teachers' instructional practices in reading and writing are a function of a) their own professional backgrounds and beliefs about effective teaching; b) the nature of the support they experience from mentors, colleagues, principals, and professional development; c) the expectations placed on them by other individuals who define the social systems of their schools; and d) the expectations placed on them by district and state policies. Novices' beliefs about how to teach effectively are based in part on their professional training, prior experiences in schools (as students, student teachers, substitute teachers, etc.), personal characteristics, and life experiences. Such beliefs about effective instruction are associated with psychic rewards related to teaching (Bandura, 1997; Hargreaves, 1993, 2001; Lortie, 1975). As discussed in the previous section, mentors, colleagues, and principals can promote new teacher development in a variety of ways (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Author, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Kardos et al., 2001).

The expectations placed on beginning elementary teachers by colleagues, principals, and district and state policies can involve their language arts curriculum, reading and writing pedagogy, and formative and summative student assessment; their approaches to managing student behavior and interacting with parents; and how they conduct themselves in staff and professional development meetings and during observations and evaluations (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Kennedy, 2005). Over time, the expectations placed on a given new teacher, and her responses to these expectations, can influence the degree of person-organization fit she experiences in her school and district (Bidwell, 2000; Kristof, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Zhao & Frank, 2003). For example, the expectations placed on a beginning teacher related to reading and writing pedagogy may be consistent with the novice's beliefs about teaching these subjects. But when they are not, the novice must select a set of instructional practices that best satisfies her desire to a) promote student learning (based on her beliefs) and b) fit into the social context (by responding to others' expectations).

Broadly defined, person-organization (P-O) fit is the "compatibility between people and organizations" (Kristof, 1996, p.1). In terms of the "person" component of P-O fit, individual teachers can vary significantly with regard to background, knowledge, skills, teaching

philosophy, and beliefs about organizational goals, including student learning. With regard to the organization component of P-O fit, this can refer to an individual teacher's perceptions of and interactions with the school's entire staff as well as an individual's perceptions of and interactions with subgroups from among the entire staff.

As conceptualized by Kristof, P-O fit obtains between an organization (e.g., a school) and an employee (e.g., a teacher) when "a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or c) both" (1996, pp.4-5). There are a number of ways to operationalize P-O fit, but four primary types have been the main focus of research: shared goals, shared values, similar preferences for work climate, and similar preferences for systems and structures (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The framework and analysis presented here are primarily concerned with the extent to which beginning elementary teachers' instructional goals in literacy and their preferences for work climate are aligned with, or shared by, those who make up the social systems of their schools.

For a more elaborate example, let's assume that Teachers A and B recently graduated from the same elementary teacher preparation program, one that emphasized integrating basic reading skills with strategies that promote reading non-fiction text for comprehension. Thus, both teachers intend to enact balanced approaches to reading instruction (i.e., these are their instructional goals) and both possess the content and curricular knowledge to do so. At the same time, both teachers must a) determine how much time to allocate to phonics, phonemic awareness, and other basic reading skills and b) balance time devoted to basic skills with time spent teaching reading comprehension and other higher-order reading and writing skills. For Teacher A in this hypothetical example, there are very few differences between her own beliefs about effective language arts instruction (based on her professional training and prior experiences) and the expectations of others in her school regarding how she should teach reading and writing (i.e., others' preferences regarding work climate). As a result, she can both promote student learning and conform to others' expectations by enacting a balanced approach.

In contrast, for Teacher B, her beliefs about effective language arts instruction are not aligned with the expectations of others in her school. Instead, colleagues convey to her that her students are not capable of engaging in higher-order reading and writing skills and that they expect her to focus primarily on basic skills. In other words, in this example, Teacher B's colleagues do not share the same instructional goals or preferences for work climate. Thus, as compared to Teacher B, we would expect to see Teacher A implement a more balanced approach, featuring greater attention to higher-order skills, and the degree of difference between

Teachers A and B could possibly be related to the extent to which they each derived satisfaction from conforming (or felt pressured to conform) to others' expectations.

III. Methods

District Sample. This study is part of a larger, mixed-methods study of beginning teachers' induction experiences in 10 Michigan and Indiana school districts.⁴ (The larger study is referred to as the Michigan Indiana Early Career Teacher (MIECT) study.) For the study described in this paper, we used qualitative research methods (i.e., structured interviews) to conduct research on seven general education elementary teachers in two Michigan districts in 2006-07. In choosing two districts for this analysis, we focused on ones that served high percentages of racial/ethnic minority and low-income students and that had hired 15 or more elementary teachers in 2005-06 and 2006-07. The districts that were selected for the analysis presented here, Daus and Kaline⁵, served 19,055 and 9,448 students respectively in 2006-07. Of the students enrolled in Daus, 51 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and more than 50 percent were of Middle Eastern descent (e.g., from families that were originally from Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, etc.). Of those enrolled in Kaline, 40 percent were eligible for free/reduced lunch and 50 percent were racial/ethnic minorities.

In August 2005 and August 2006, both districts provided multi-day orientations prior to the start of the school year for teachers who were new to the districts. In Daus, the orientation addressed state language arts and mathematics content standards, district tests in these subjects, working with English language learners and culturally diverse students, and the role of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers. Similarly, the orientation in Kaline covered such topics as state language arts and math standards, district tests, classroom management strategies, technology, and the role of the Kaline Teachers' Association. In both districts, each first- and second-year teacher was matched with an experienced teacher who served as their formal mentor and both Daus and Kaline provided workshops during the 2006-07 school year for teachers who were new to the districts. These workshops typically took place on weekday afternoons and addressed classroom management, working with diverse learners, student testing, and parent-teacher relationships.

In Kaline, each elementary school was required to use the Four Block approach to reading and writing. This approach featured guided reading, self-selected (or silent) reading, writing, and working with words (similar to spelling, with an emphasis on making meaning and using words in their proper contexts). In contrast, elementary schools in Dearborn employed a

variety of reading and writing curricula. Some schools used the Linda Dorn model, others employed Reading First, and still others were required by the district to use basal readers. The Linda Dorn model features an intervention approach in which elementary students are assigned to reading groups based on their abilities and those students with reading difficulties receive comprehensive assistance from regular classroom teachers, literacy coaches, and others. Part of *No Child Left Behind*, Reading First is a federal reading program purportedly based on research that targets students in grades kindergarten through 3.⁶

Teacher Sample. In selecting first- and second-year teachers from Daus and Kaline to participate in the study, we focused on general education elementary teachers who were teaching in core content areas (i.e., reading, writing, mathematics and science and/or social studies) in grades 1-5. All first- and second-year teachers in core content areas in grades 1-5 in both districts were invited to participate, but they had to a) be teaching full-time, b) have earned a standard teaching certificate, and c) have completed university-based teacher preparation.⁷ Furthermore, the student demographics in the study participants' classrooms and schools had to be consistent with those throughout their districts. That is, we wanted to make sure that a given teacher's induction experiences and language arts practices were not unduly influenced by having much higher or much lower percentages of low-income or racial/ethnic minority students than other teachers in the study. In sum, the criteria for selecting new teacher study participants included a) teaching in core content areas in grades 1-5, b) teaching full-time, c) having earned a standard teaching certificate, and d) having demographics in their classrooms and schools that were consistent with those throughout their districts.

In 2006-07, there were 19 elementary teachers in Daus and 13 elementary teachers in Kaline who met the selection criteria. Of these, 14 in Daus and 10 in Kaline completed surveys for the larger MIECT study in fall 2006. Of the teachers who completed surveys, all 24 in both districts were invited to participate in the interview-based study (described in this paper); of those invited, 8 in Daus and 5 in Kaline volunteered to participate. Due to limitations in resources, in the study described here we included 4 of the 8 Daus teachers who volunteered to participate and 3 of the 5 Kaline teachers who volunteered to participate. In other words, 21 percent (4/19) of the Daus teachers who met the selection criteria were interviewed and 23 percent (3/13) of the Kaline teachers who met the selection criteria were interviewed. The four Daus teachers taught in grades 1, 3, 3, and 5 while the three Kaline teachers taught in grades 3, 4, and 5. In sum, four teachers from four different elementary schools in Daus participated in the study while three teachers from two different elementary schools in Kaline participated in the study. (See Table 1 in the Appendix for information about the study participants and the schools in which they worked in 2006-07.)

Data Collection. Data collection during the 2006-07 school year involved interviewing seven beginning elementary teachers one to two times each (winter 2007 and/or spring 2007). In the interviews, we probed to learn about the study participants' professional backgrounds, teaching assignments, and the reading and writing curricular and instructional expectations they experienced in their schools. In addition, the teachers were asked about the content and frequency of their interactions with their formally assigned mentors, colleagues, principals, and school- and district-based literacy specialists; and their involvement in induction and professional development activities. We also probed to learn about the study participants' experiences with the formal teacher evaluation process in their schools. (The interview protocol used with the study participants is included in the Appendix.)

Modes of Analysis. For each round of qualitative data collection (winter 2007 and spring 2007), a detailed analytic memo was written immediately following each audiotaped interview that described the participant's meaning and tone during the interview. In addition, each interview was transcribed verbatim in its entirety. We employed NVivo7 software to analyze data from the interviews in order to generate initial codes (see Table 2 in the Appendix for our lists of initial and final codes.) . Through a process of grouping categories together and using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we moved to higher levels of abstraction and eventually came up with the following codes: professional preparation, teaching experience, teaching assignment, induction and professional development, mentor, in-school colleagues, principal, school-based literacy specialist, school professional community, reading curriculum, reading instruction, writing curriculum, writing instruction, grouping, classroom assessment, district and state student testing, and teacher evaluation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For the second stage of qualitative data analysis, we compiled case reports by districts (Daus and Kaline) and identified emergent themes regarding a) reading curricula and instructional practices, b) writing curricula and instructional practices, c) interactions with mentors, d) interactions with colleagues, e) interactions with school-based literacy specialists, f) interactions with principals, and g) person-organization fit. We then explored possible connections between/among P-O fit and several other themes. This technique is recommended by Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speigman (2004) as a way to reveal possible associations involving new teachers, including ones between a) professional preparation and instructional practices; b) interactions with mentor and instructional practices; and c) interactions with colleagues and instructional practices. At the same time, several connections among additional factors and outcomes were evident includes ones among a) a) professional preparation, P-O fit, and instructional practices;

b) interactions with mentor and/or colleagues, P-O fit, and instructional practices; and c) interactions with principal, P-O fit, and instructional practices.

Degree of person-organization fit was the key analytical unit in identifying the processes that new elementary teachers went through in learning about the reading and writing curricula in their districts; interacting with mentors, colleagues, and others; and making decisions about language arts instruction. Thus, data analysis first involved ascertaining degree of P-O fit for each participant during the year of the study (2006-07) and whether this changed throughout the year. Next, in developing an account of how the study participants negotiated relationships with mentors, colleagues, and others and made instructional decisions about reading and writing, we grouped the participants based on degree of P-O fit. This enabled us to analyze the ways in which degree of P-O fit was associated with a) the nature and frequency of new teachers' interactions with mentors, colleagues, principals, and others; and b) the nature of their reading and writing instruction. It also permitted us to consider how various factors (e.g., professional beliefs, prior experiences, and school contexts) seemed to contribute to variations in P-O fit.

IV. Degree of P-O Fit; the Roles of Mentors, Colleagues, and Administrators; and Novices' Reading and Writing Instruction

In this study, five of the seven beginning elementary teachers experienced strong person-organization fit with regard to their mentors and colleagues. Of these five, three were teaching in Kaline and two were in Daus. Further, four of these five teachers also reported strong P-O fit with their principals. In contrast, two of the Daus teachers experienced much weaker P-O fit with their colleagues. In this section, we examine how the study participants' professional relations with mentors, colleagues, and administrators seemed to contribute to the degree of P-O fit that they experienced in their schools and how degree of P-O fit seemed to be associated with their instructional practices in reading and writing.

In Kaline, all three study participants frequently addressed issues related to reading and writing instruction in interactions with their mentors and colleagues. Elise Volcker was a first-year, 3rd-grade teacher in 2006-07 at Barnaby Elementary School and she was assigned to a mentor who also taught 3rd grade at Barnaby. Similar to her mentor, Volcker spent time each day on guided reading and self-selected reading, and she focused on writing and working with words a few days each week. Further, for most of her lessons, she modeled a specific strategy, had the students work on the strategy, and then talked with them about what they learned. Volcker indicated that she communicated with her mentor daily about the Four Block language arts

curriculum and that she met weekly with her mentor and the other 3rd-grade teacher at the school. In her view, the three of them knew each other's curricula and teaching styles well: "We are doing the same thing . . . covering the same (topics)." After attending professional development on writing and guided reading, Volcker noted that she had opportunities "to go in to see (these) other colleagues and watch them use (new ideas) in the classroom. And I get together with my colleagues and we talk about it."

Volcker's mentor made herself available regularly to answer questions and informally observe her teaching. For example, when Volcker faced a challenging issue in planning instruction, her mentor talked with her on a Sunday for a full hour. In addition, the principal at Barnaby worked closely with Volcker and other teachers on reading and writing instruction. As part of the district's teacher evaluation process, he observed her four times in 2006-07 and raised questions during post-observation conferences about how particular lessons fit with the Four Block curriculum. Overall, the strong degree of fit between Volcker and her school helped her enact and refine the district's curriculum in her classroom. She felt comfortable sharing her ideas concerning language arts with her mentor and the other 3rd-grade teacher and she also commented on the climate in the school: "We have a really good staff here, a really close-knit team, and I feel like I can talk to any of them in the hallway."

A second Kaline teacher, Angela Stanwick, was a first-year, 4th-grade teacher in 2006-07 at Mifflin Elementary School. Similar to Volcker (and consistent with the district's curriculum), for most of Stanwick's lessons, she modeled reading and writing strategies, gave students opportunities to practice them, and then reflected with them on the process. In her words, "(w)ith each Block, there is always a 'before', 'during', and 'after' . . . 'What did you learn?' is a question that is almost always asked after each thinking strategy." For her part, Stanwick talked regularly with her mentor about language arts instruction. The district provided half-day planning days each semester during which she and her mentor would discuss the Four Block curriculum and plan units in reading and writing. In February 2007, for example, they "sat down and came up with what we would be doing for our Guided Reading lessons, so we are on the same page on stories we are using."

Along with her mentor, Stanwick found it useful to talk about writing instruction with a 1st-grade teacher and the 5th-grade teachers at Mifflin. The 1st-grade teacher was "in her second year of teaching. I go to her because she is someone right there with me. For instance, writing, I feel, is my weakest Block . . . and she's a fantastic writer." In addition, while the district laid out a broad structure and daily topics for writing instruction, Stanwick consulted with her mentor and the 5th-grade teachers on specific materials, instructional activities, and grouping strategies to use

in teaching writing. Like Volcker, Stanwick's principal strongly supported her professional learning. He arranged for her to attend professional development on the Four Block approach during the summer (after she was hired) and once a month during the school year. He also worked extensively with her as part of the teacher evaluation process. In her words, "(f)or my evaluations, he still always gives me suggestions, but he knows where I am at. I've got a lot of support, which is nice."

The third Kaline teacher, Maria Helton, was a second-year, 5th-grade teacher in 2006-07 at Edwards Elementary. Like Volcker and Stanwick, Helton experienced strong P-O fit with her mentor, colleagues, and principal. In 2005-06, the school's reading specialist was assigned to be Helton's mentor and they met regularly at scheduled times to discuss the Four Block curriculum. In 2006-07, Helton continued to talk with her mentor frequently and to utilize her as a resource. In particular, she consulted with her mentor about appropriate books to use with different students, her mentor modeled reading and writing lessons for her, and she observed Helton and provided feedback on her teaching. According to Helton, "I talk to her a couple times a week. I always have a question or I need something . . . (r)eading or writing, I would go to (my mentor) because she is the specialist for it."

Along with her mentor, Helton met in 2006-07 with the other 5th-grade teachers at Edwards a couple times each week to discuss curricular issues, student learning, and efforts to implement new ideas from district professional development sessions. She also noted that her principal was knowledgeable about the Four Block curriculum and arranged for her to attend trainings on it. Finally, Helton's high degree of person-organization fit was captured by a comment she made in an interview about her first two years of teaching at Edwards: "It's fun, I love it. I am glad I am a teacher."

Like the three beginning teachers in Kaline, two of the four Daus teachers had high P-O fit with their mentors and colleagues. One of them, Annette Wilson, was a first-year, 3rd-grade teacher at Monroe Elementary, where she had served as a long-term, 2nd-grade substitute teacher in 2005-06. During that year, she worked closely with another 2nd-grade teacher at Monroe, who was her unofficial mentor in 2005-06,⁸ and this teacher served as her formal mentor in 2006-07. At Monroe, each morning was devoted to three hours of reading and writing instruction, and (similar to the Four Block approach in Kaline), teachers were expected to teach learning strategies to students and have them apply them on their own. Wilson talked frequently with her mentor in 2005-06 about "teaching mini-lessons because she was good at every day teaching them a mini lesson and then having them go and apply it. And that was something I struggled with." Wilson noted that her mentor had an open-door policy, which meant that she was free to

enter her classroom at any time when she had questions or concerns. In her words, “I went to her with any question that I had . . . and she would come into my room with questions, too.”

Along with her mentor, in 2006-07 Wilson found the other 3rd-grade teachers and the school’s resource teacher to be helpful. Her grade-team met weekly to discuss such topics as writing realistic fiction, writing informational text, and devising rubrics to evaluate students’ writing. For her part, the resource teacher visited her classroom weekly to help with her reading groups and to provide instruction in test-taking strategies. According to Wilson, “(s)he’s been really helpful – she’s in here all the time.” Also, the principal at Monroe worked very closely with Wilson on her language arts teaching. As Wilson noted, “she is required to do two formal observations so one was two hours, two straight hours. And then last week she came in. It was supposed to be 40 minutes, it was about an hour and 20 minutes.” As part of the teacher evaluation process, her principal provided feedback on the relationship between the instruction she observed and Wilson’s goals for student learning (as represented by state standards) and her goals for herself. Finally, Wilson commented that the staff at Monroe were responsive to teachers’ needs including her own: “Definitely. That’s why I’m really glad to be at this school. I can’t speak for too many others, but I know that I talk with other people (at other schools) who don’t have the same comfort with other teachers.”

A second novice teacher in Daus, Jacqueline Morton, taught 1st grade at Hoskins Elementary in 2006-07. She was in her second full-year of teaching, and had previously taught kindergarten full-time and 2nd grade part-time at other schools in Daus. As a second-grade teacher, she had been responsible for math, science, and social studies while her co-teacher had taught language arts. In 2006-07, Morton met regularly with her mentor, another 1st-grade teacher at Hoskins, to discuss reading and writing instruction. While the school did not set curricular expectations in these areas, over time Morton incorporated a number of her mentor’s strategies into her own teaching. With regard to reading, her mentor observed her and suggested activities, books, and other materials. In terms of writing, for example, she followed her mentor’s model: “First you write, then you publish, then you illustrate, and you start making books.” According to Morton, fifth-grade teachers at Hoskins reported to the first-grade teachers “that these kids know how to write because (they enjoy it) and they immerse themselves in it.”

In addition to her mentor, Morton also consulted with the four other first-grade teachers at Hoskins about reading groups and the learning needs of individual students. For example, when a given student was the only one in a 1st-grade class reading at a particular level, the teachers would explore ways to temporarily move him to a different class for reading (so she or he could be in a reading group with peers at the same level). In Morton’s words, the other 1st-grade

teachers are “all wonderful about answering anything and helping and giving any resources – they’re fabulous.” In contrast to Wilson, though, Morton experienced less P-O fit with regard to the administrators at her school. In 2006-07, the principal and assistant principal were new to Hoskins and Morton commented on their relations with the more experienced teachers at the school: “There is quite a bit of uneasiness in the building and you can tell. They were used to the other one and they just loved the other one so they’re kind of butting heads with the two new administrators.” While overall Morton was well-aligned with her mentor and grade-level colleagues, her relations with her administrators were one area where her P-O fit seemed lower than that of Wilson or the three Kaline teachers.

In contrast to Wilson and Morton, two other teachers in Daus experienced less P-O fit with their colleagues. One of them, Jenny Fadlallah, was a second-year teacher in 2006-07 at McIntosh Elementary, where she taught 3rd grade. In 2005-06, she had taught 5th grade at a different school in Daus, Garrett Elementary. In 2005-06, Fadlallah worked closely with her mentor, another 5th-grade teacher at Garrett. In her words, she had “an amazing mentor last year.” The two of them planned their lessons and units together on a regular basis and frequently met to discuss whether various ideas had worked with their students: “So it was as though we were on the same level and we would collaborate; it was just phenomenal.” At McIntosh, though, Fadlallah perceived that her approach to teaching was not supported by the veteran teachers at the school. In language arts, she used guided reading groups and taught comprehension lessons, but she did not closely follow the school’s curriculum (i.e., the Linda Dorn approach). Instead, she focused on multiple intelligences in her teaching and for each of her lessons, she used a Power Point presentation, a short video, and a hands-on activity.

According to Fadlallah, her principal supported her approach to teaching and wanted her to share aspects of her pedagogy with other teachers at the schools. In addition based on her positive experience at Garrett in 2005-06, she started the year at McIntosh with a lot of confidence and excitement about collaborating with others. She commented,

(I)t was really difficult coming in here because I received a lot of negative feedback where before at the other school it was more open communication – and the administrator here wants us to have open communication (but it’s not the norm here). They want me to keep what I do to myself . . . it was difficult to accept.

Despite her principal’s concern and efforts to promote collaboration, Fadlallah felt isolated among a staff that largely consisted of teachers with ten or more years of experience.

The final teacher in the sample, Rebecca Paduski, was a second-year, 5th-grade teacher in 2006-07 at Tempo Elementary in Daus. Compared to Fadlallah, Paduski experienced more P-O

fit at her school, in part due to fairly strong relationships with her principal and her mentor in her second year. At the same time, few of the other faculty were willing to meet with her, answer her questions, or collaborate on instructional issues. Consequently, her level of P-O fit was considerably lower than that of the Kaline teachers or Wilson and Morton. At Tempo, teachers were required by the district to use a basal series for reading instruction that was originally published in 1988. While Paduski employed the basals to some extent, she focused more on the Linda Dorn model, which was not widely used at her school. In 2005-06, Paduski taught 4th grade at Tempo and was assigned to a mentor who was very ill and missed many days of work, thus creating an awkward situation for her. She noted, “I had to kind of, you know, rely on what I did the previous year in student teaching.” In 2006-07, Paluski was matched with a different mentor, one who also was teaching 5th grade, and this was a much better fit for her. She reported that she exchanged ideas for reading and writing assessment with her mentor and the other 5th-grade teacher on a regular basis.

Paduski’s relationship with her principal also contributed to her sense of P-O fit at the school. Her principal observed her twice a year and provided feedback on her teaching. In addition, Paduski set goals for herself for 2006-07 and her principal helped her assess her progress towards meeting the goals. According to Paduski, her principal “taught me so much in the past two years . . . (s)he works close with me, she comes in to observe me. And it’s been, you know, good feedback and things to work on. She likes to challenge.” Despite her relationships with her principal, her mentor, and the other 5th-grade teacher at Tempo, Paduski commented that she felt somewhat isolated at the school. In her two years, she felt that few of the veteran teachers had made an effort to get to know her, learn about her approach to teaching, or respond to her efforts to get to know them. In her words, “I teach in a building that is not as open I guess as some other buildings. I know that at Monroe they constantly have an open door policy.” Further, when asked if other teachers at Tempo took her ideas seriously, Paduski declined to answer.

In sum, five of the study participants experienced strong P-O fit with their mentors and colleagues, and of these, four of the five were well-aligned with their principals. On the other hand, Fadlallah and Paduski experienced lower levels of P-O fit in their schools. The nature and frequency of these beginning teachers’ interactions with their mentors and colleagues seemed related to their degree of P-O fit, and degree of fit, in turn, seemed to influence their decisions about reading and writing instruction. Further, degree of fit seemed directly related to novices’ opportunities to make use of school-based resources (e.g., mentors, colleagues, reading specialists,

resource teachers) to improve their language arts instruction. In the next section, we examine several factors that seemed to contribute to degree of P-O fit among the study participants.

V. Factors that Seemed to Contribute to Degree of P-O Fit

A number of factors seemed to influence the nature of the beginning teachers' interactions with their mentors, colleagues, and administrators; the nature of their language arts teaching; and their degree of person-organization fit in their schools. In this section, we explicate four of these possible factors: district policy coherence, novices' professional beliefs, their prior experiences, and their school contexts.

District Policy Coherence. In Kaline, the district required all elementary teachers to employ the Four Block approach to reading and writing. This curricular model provided broad outlines for the learning activities teachers were expected to use (i.e., guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words); the time they were to spend on these activities; and the topics they were to cover. At the same time, this approach also gave teachers some latitude in determining specific lessons, materials, and learning tasks for their students. In several ways, the Four Block approach promoted frequent, substantive interactions between the new teachers in this study and their mentors and colleagues. In particular, the curriculum gave the novices and veterans a common language and a common set of expectations, but also expected them to constantly make highly-specified decisions about how to enact the curriculum. In contrast, elementary schools in Daus used several different language arts curricula. In combination with the fact that many early career teachers had worked as long-term substitutes in the district and were frequently transferred after their first year, this meant that novices in Daus often did not share the same professional beliefs or language concerning reading and writing instruction as their more experienced colleagues.

Professional Beliefs. In Daus, two study participants had beliefs about effecting language arts teaching that differed from those of their colleagues. In Paduski's case, she placed relatively less emphasis on the basal readers at Tempo (required by her district at that school) and focused more on the Linda Dorn model. On one hand, she had opportunities to learn and refine this approach in meetings with her mentor, her principal, and the other 5th-grade teacher at her school; at the same time, she had few interactions with other teaching staff at Tempo, in part because many of them employed a different approach to reading and writing instruction. With regard to Fadlallah, her approach to language arts instruction was well-aligned with that of her mentor at Garrett Elementary in 2005-06. But a year later, after being transferred to McIntosh, Fadlallah

received negative reinforcement from other teachers at her school and perceived few opportunities to collaborate with them or share her ideas.

The experiences of Paduski and Fadlallah can be contrasted with those of other study participants whose professional beliefs were well-aligned with others in their schools. In Kaline, Volcker shared similar beliefs about effective reading instruction with her mentor and the other 3rd-grade teacher at her school. Similarly, Helton and her mentor, the reading specialist at Edwards Elementary, employed identical lessons, materials, and writing tasks. Also, an interesting counter-example is that of Morton, the 1st-grade teacher at Hoskins Elementary in Daus. Since she had not been responsible for language arts when she taught 2nd-grade part-time, Morton had not developed strong beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing prior to joining the faculty at Hoskins. As a result, in 2006-07, she looked to her mentor and the other 1st-grade teachers for guidance in developing beliefs and pedagogical practices in the areas of reading and writing.

Prior Experiences. Closely related to novices' beliefs about literacy instruction were their prior experiences as student teachers, substitute teachers, and full-time teachers. In Kaline, all three study participants had served as student teachers at schools in the district where they were responsible for teaching the Four Block approach. Further, one of the Kaline teachers, Stanwick, had been a student and a long-term substitute teacher at Mifflin, the school where she was teaching in 2006-07. Despite some awkwardness as she made the transition to working with her former principal and several former teachers, she eventually experienced strong P-O fit at Mifflin, in part because of her past connections to the school. In Daus, two of the four teachers, Fadlallah and Morton, had been transferred after their first year of full-time teaching and the others, Paduski and Wilson, had worked as long-term substitutes at other Daus schools before getting hired at their current schools.

As a result, three of the teachers (with the exception of Morton) were exposed to different language arts curricula from those they were expected to teach at their schools in 2006-07. In the case of Wilson, she had served as a long-term sub at Mifflin in 2005-06 and the school's literacy curriculum was consistent with her beliefs. In the cases of Fadlallah and Paduski, though, as discussed above, their beliefs about reading and writing instruction (based in part on prior experiences) were in conflict with those of other teachers at their schools. Thus, the high rate of teacher layoffs and transfers in Daus, combined with the district's lack of policy coherence regarding language arts curriculum, seemed contribute to low P-O fit for these two teachers.

Finally, school context seemed particularly salient for the teachers in this study. Five of the study participants indicated that other teachers in their schools were available to help them,

responsive to their concerns, and interested in their ideas. In particular, the comments by the Kaline teachers as well as Wilson and Morton suggest that opportunities to address instructional issues with mentors and colleagues contributed to the high degrees of P-O fit that they experienced. On the other hand, Fadlallah and Paduski received clear messages from other teachers in their schools that they were not interested in these novices' questions, ideas, or instructional practices. As a result, both novices had lower P-O fit than the other teachers in the study.

VI. Conclusion, Implications for Future Research

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Endnotes

¹ The term “person-organization fit” refers to the degree of compatibility between an individual (e.g., a teacher) and the organization (e.g., a school) in which that individual works (Kristof, 1996). In Section II below, we elaborate on this definition and consider its application for research on beginning teachers.

² According to Kapadia, Coca, and Easton (2007), teachers who experienced strong mentoring received help with teaching and assessment strategies, classroom management, district policies and procedures, and communication with parents; and they had opportunities to observe and be observed by their mentors.

³ In schools with veteran-oriented cultures, Kardos and colleagues (2001) reported that the school culture was defined by experienced teachers, and new teachers were given no special status, which seemed to result in little orientation, induction, or support. In schools identified as having novice-oriented cultures, the majority of the teachers in the school were new to the profession. There were often higher levels of enthusiasm in these schools, but few formal induction supports were offered and there was a general lack of expertise (Kardos et al., 2001),

⁴ The 10 districts in the larger study ranged in size in 2006-07 from 8,242 students in grades K-12 to 27,066 students; the percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch ranged from 29 percent to 64 percent; and the percentages of racial/ethnic minority students ranged from 19 percent to 83 percent.

⁵ Pseudonyms are used for all of the districts, schools, and teachers named in this paper.

⁶ A series of recent research studies of Reading First have provided little evidence that it has a significant impact on students’ reading performance.

⁷ We sought teachers who were teaching full-time because we believed that their professional needs and instructional growth would be different from those of part-time teachers and that they were more likely to develop close working relationships with mentors, colleagues, and/or principals. We sought teachers who had earned standard certificates because we felt that their needs and instructional growth would be different from teachers who had entered the profession through alternative or emergency routes.

⁸ As a long-term substitute in Daus in 2005-06, Wilson was not formally assigned a mentor during that school year.