Novice Teachers and Their Acquisition of Work-Related Information

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Citation

Abstract

This qualitative case study explores types of work-related information that novice teachers seek out and learn that is related to their daily work tasks. Eighteen experienced K-6 teachers offer their reflections about the dynamics of seeking and interpreting work-related information during their initial years of teaching. In-depth interviews were used to ask participants to reflect on their pathways of finding and using work-related information when they were novice teachers. The participants described nuances of their school settings that provided catalysts and barriers to gaining and using work-related information.

Keywords: Teachers' work-related information, information acquisition, novice teachers, information sharing

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New graduates of formal teacher preparation programs frequently encounter difficulties when they experience the practical realities of schools. Teacher education programs tend to predominantly orient pre-service teachers either theoretically or practically (Nottis, Feuerstein, Murray, & Adams, 2000) and the type of orientation can affect the success of beginning teachers. The satisfaction that teachers experience in performing their daily routines is linked to factors such as job attrition and sense of self-worth (Pillay, Boulton-Lewis, Wilss, & Lankshear, 2003). The daily work within schools is embedded in contexts, and novice teachers experience unexpected events and situations that occur daily in school life (Lowery, 2002). This study asks experienced teachers to reflect back on their novice experiences, and describe the types of work-related information that could help them perform their jobs and survive in their new schools. For the purposes of this study, work-related information means job-specific information that can help new teachers perform tasks (e.g., getting children to line up orderly in the hallways, restoring order after recess, interacting with parents).

Little is known about experienced teachers' perceptions of work-related information that can benefit novice teachers. Furthermore, little is known about how a school setting can help or hinder a novice teacher's acquisition of work-related information. The purpose of this study is to provide practitioners and researchers insights regarding work-related information that can benefit novice teachers. These insights are gleaned from the recollections of experienced teachers who described work-related information from their years as novice teachers. The following question guided this study: What are the recollections of experienced K-6 teachers regarding their experiences with work-related information as novice teachers?

Novice Teachers and Work-Related Information

As a preliminary step of this study, attention was given to the term "novice teacher." Novice teachers, beginning teachers, neophytes, and pre-service teachers are depicted in many studies that focus on teachers who have difficulties dealing with their tasks at work. For the purposes of this study, the term novice teacher is defined as a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience.

Experienced teachers were asked to reflect on their daily activities and experiences in schools. Because this study is about long-term processes that led to the achievement of current status, this study required experienced teachers to deeply reflect and search for insights. In this study, work-related information helps to form the task-based knowledge that teachers need to perform their jobs. Task-based knowledge is defined as general work (basic tasks) that teachers perform as part of their daily routines, including both explicit tasks and implicit tasks. Explicit tasks are those imposed by the rules within a school setting, and implicit tasks are those carried out autonomously. Explicit tasks in school settings can be articulated by the school principal or in written policies and procedures. Implicit tasks are typically more difficult for novice teachers to learn because they may be shrouded in ambiguities of the work setting and not easily shared by peer workers. In this study, experienced teachers explain circumstances that affected their interactions with work-related information when they were novice teachers.

Situating Work-Related Learning of Novice Teachers in the Context of Schools

One may argue that the learning by teachers within their school contexts is a neglected area of inquiry. Researchers outside of the school context are typically not privy to the learning processes used by teachers in action. They cannot observe how teachers access and learn from work-related information. A few scholars have examined how teachers have evolved as learners

in their workplaces. McLaughlin (1993) views the school context as a professional learning community for teachers in terms of social and psychological growth. Flores (2004) emphasizes that teachers develop sociologically and psychologically in schools and that schools can be professional learning communities in which teachers collaboratively learn from one another and develop their knowledge and skills. However, these claims are rarely highlighted in the literature, perhaps because of the unofficial and invisible phenomena that influence teacher learning in school contexts. Schools are workplaces for teachers, but schools are also places of their informal learning. This informal learning begins when new teachers enter the building for the first time and begin to seek out work-related information that can help them perform their jobs.

Campbell, Evans, Neill, and Packwood (1992) assert that minimal research has been conducted on the experiences of beginning teachers in schools. An often cited refrain of new teachers is that a gap exists between the relevance of their professional education and the demand of their work realities. As a result, both new and experienced teachers often access informal pathways to acquire work-related information that is relevant to their jobs. Powell (1998) observes that an enormous amount of the teacher's information and knowledge resides in their minds, and unfortunately, barriers within school settings can restrict teachers from sharing and learning from each other.

Experienced teachers tend to take for granted the work-related information that they have accessed and learned over time, and they may be unclear of its origin. The practical knowledge that they have formed from this information may not be readily transferable; it is different from the "official" knowledge that can be located in a textbook or a "how to" manual. Teacher education pre-service programs are unable to supply all of the work-related information that novice teachers need to perform their work roles because much of this information is context

specific within the school setting. Novice teachers may not encounter the need to seek out and learn from this type of information until they are immersed in their school situations. The experienced teachers of this study provide a glimpse of the topics and related types of information that affected their early years as novice teachers.

Experienced Elementary Teachers Reflecting Back on Their Novice Years

This study sought out the reflections of experienced K-6 teachers regarding their interactions with work-related information. Teachers with at least five years of practical field experiences served as participants of this study. The use of the experienced teachers as the primary source of data in this study was based on assertions in the literature. According to beginning teacher developmental theories, the concerns of novice teachers are quite different from the concerns of experienced teachers. Experienced teachers are more focused on long term professional tasks, whereas the concerns of novice teachers are driven more by emotion and their short term survival in the work context. These new teachers are swimming in a sensory overload with new co-workers, a new physical environment, and new students. Survival is the metaphor that is often used to depict the new teacher experience. Novice teachers typically struggle to sort through all of the new information they face early in their job tenure, and they can experience disconnects between their prior knowledge and the pressing problems of their work reality. Pope, Smith, Goodwin, and Mort (2003) provide logic for the use of experienced teachers in this current study:

> What happens when you are very junior, is that you don't recognize abnormal because you are not used to normal, and experience teaches you what is normal, as much as what is abnormal. So you know when things aren't going the way they should be. (p. 652)

Taking these points into account, experienced teachers who had already worked through the confusing period of their early teaching years were selected to serve as the primary sources of data in this study. The reflective narratives of past experiences of these teachers are used for the reconstruction of their own developmental resources. Conversely, as noted by Eisenhart and Borko (1991), novice teachers have few opportunities to be reflective in the workplace. Several authors (Colley, 2002; Gidwitz & Wish, 2001; Herbert & Ramsay, 2004; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004) note that beginning teachers with less than five years experience have a high rate of turnover. From these studies, one can surmise that novice teachers face many challenges in their work context within their first five years.

Methods of the Study

This study was conducted in a north-central region of Illinois, USA. In-depth interviews with 18 experienced teachers provided the main source of data in this case study. These experienced teachers taught in middle to upper-middle class schools. Other sources of data were used to support the interview data and help to confirm the emergent themes. They included reflective journals, formal documents, observations, and field notes. Two to three interview sessions were conducted with each study participant, and a consent form was signed by each study participant. The early segment of the initial interviews focused on general career information and the participants' recollections of their entry into the teaching profession. The next segment of the interviews asked teachers to comment on their daily work tasks and their recollections regarding the routines or processes they utilized to gain work-related information that was relevant to their daily work tasks. In essence, experienced teachers were requested to reflect on their interactions with work-related information. Prior to each interview, I made a rough outline of the interview sequence and prepared alternative questions in case there were

unexpected reactions from participants. After each interview, I recreated field notes concerning

the interview, and later constructed a personal journal that highlighted my feelings, observations,

dilemmas, or other information worthy of documenting. During the interview, I focused on

active listening and maintaining a comfortable atmosphere that allowed the participants to

narrate their experiences.

The participants were asked to reflect on their early period of practical field experiences

as novice teachers. Chain sampling was used to include teachers who had more than five years of

teaching experience. Study participants were sought after approval of the study by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB). Table 1 illustrates the 18 participants' basic information, and

the pseudonyms of the participants.

Table 1

Profile of Participants

Name	Years of Teaching Experience	Grade Level (Current Position)
Emily	6 years	3rd grade
Emma	18 years	5th
Madison	18 years	1st
Isabella	15 years	1st and 2nd (multi-age class)
Ava	18 years	1st
Abigail	35 years	6th
Olivia	10 years	Principal (after 10 years-teaching)
Hannah	30 years	5th
Sophia	15 years	2nd
Samantha	16 years	2nd
Elizabeth	9 years	Full-time graduate student
Ashley	20 years	Kindergarten
Mia	8 years	6th
Alexis	11 years	5th
Sarah	20 years	$1^{st}\sim5^{th}$ (special ed. Teacher)
Natalie	20 years	5th
Grace	24 years	5th
Chloe	15 years	Kindergarten

Analysis of Data

All interviews were tape recorded after the participants' permission was obtained. The recorded tapes were transcribed verbatim and the written data were later analyzed. I carefully listened to each interview tape and identified the dominant or recurring themes that were linked with other cases for triangulation. An appropriate software program (N-vivo) was used to conceptualize data coding. Data analysis strategies included concept maps and themes and linkages within the frameworks that were suggested above. According to Eraut (2000), workplace learning is a challenging topic of inquiry because of the difficult nature of drawing out the issues from the participants. Therefore, multiple sources of data were gathered, and the analysis of data was thorough. Data analysis was peer-reviewed by an experienced qualitative researcher, and member checks were used after the transcription of interviews to ensure that my interpretations were accurate. Cross-checking with my observations, field notes, and my own personal reflections as an elementary school teacher also contributed to the triangulation of data. From these multiple sources of data, a thick description was built to provide a telling portrayal of the nature of this inquiry (Yin, 1994).

Minimizing Threats to Trustworthiness

Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain that different techniques are needed to provide credibility to qualitative inquiry compared to quantitative inquiry. An important issue with qualitative research pertains to consistency that is obtained with data collection tools (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). Consistency is established by examining whether emergent themes are in accord with themes in other data and cases (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Triangulation (source-method-researcher agreement) is often sought in qualitative inquiry, and it can involve several strategies (e.g., member-checking, rich and thick description, self-reflection, presenting negative or

discrepant information, spending prolonged time, peer debriefing, and external auditor review) (Creswell, 1994).

In this study, select strategies were applied. First, themes were carefully categorized and compared to other contexts, and data from transcripts and other supplemental data were scrutinized. A compelling narrative was crafted to support the interpretations of the multiple data sources. The study considered and adapted several frameworks that have been previously applied by researchers. Findings of the research were thoughtfully analyzed by asking contrasting questions.

Positionality of the Researcher

As an undergraduate student majoring in education, I believed that upon graduation I would be able to professionally perform workplace tasks without much difficulty. When I later encountered difficulty in handling many professional tasks in practice, I still believed that a graduate degree in education would provide the information I needed to survive in the workplace. With a master's degree in education, I put myself into the role of elementary school teacher and I experienced considerable conflict between unexpected work realities and my base of knowledge related to teaching. I found that I was struggling to understand aspects of my job, and the information that I seemed to need was mysteriously embedded in the work context – difficult for me to access and sometimes challenging to interpret. I came to believe that novice teachers (such as myself), regardless of their educational backgrounds, seemed to suffer from similar problems that stemmed from the conflicting realities of their work and their expectations about teaching that were groomed in formal educational training. I wondered about the observable differences between experienced teachers and novice teachers; one group seemed to

succeed in practice, while the latter group struggled to cope on the job. With this sense of wonderment, I began this inquiry.

School Settings as Sources of Work-Related Information for Novice Teachers

Environmental characteristics of schools can be key factors that affect how novice teachers seek out information that is relevant to performing their jobs. Novice teachers go through processes of observing cultural phenomena in their attempts to understand the know-why (cause-and-effect relationships) of incumbent teachers' common behavioral patterns. School settings can be dominated by unwritten or implicit information that may be difficult to unearth and interpret. Because novice teachers lack deep contextual knowledge, they tend to try to find sequential logic in the experienced teachers' performance. As a result, novice teachers can experience confusion and frustration in their new work settings.

Socialization involves transferring values and norms of a certain group "through observation, imitation, and practice" (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2004, p. 55). Schoonmaker (2002) notes that socialization is a powerful process that influences the development of novice teachers. The socialization process is a natural way for novice teachers to acquire work-related information from their colleagues and other stakeholders (Lortie, 1975/2002). Lortie emphasizes that this process takes place through "doing-while-doing" (p. 60). The following sections provide excerpts from the data in which the study participants describe their interactions with work-related information when they were novice teachers. The first section pertains to information relative to the various stakeholder relationships that novice teachers encounter.

Stakeholder Relationships

Schools consist of multiple, close stakeholder relationships: Principal (and other administrators), parents, community representatives, students, and teachers themselves. Teachers

are the main decision makers within their own classrooms; however, the principal affects the

whole school atmosphere at the school level. The parents do not actually work for the school but

they can strongly affect the climate and culture of the school. The students are a core concern of

teachers' decisions in schools because teachers judge situational conditions based on students'

needs. Isabella, who was working in a different profession and changed her career to teaching,

points out this relationship. She states that teaching is dealing with parent-child-teacher triangles,

a relationship that is different from what she encountered in the business world.

> The biggest difference is in most professions you are dealing solely with adults. When
>
> you're in the teaching profession, especially in middle school and down, you're dealing
>
> with children. So you're dealing with behaviors that wouldn't exist in the adult
>
> population. You're also dealing with the parent-child-teacher triangle which you don't
>
> have when you're in the business world. It's a very different type of situation.
>
> Alexis describes job tasks and daily routines of the teaching profession as "juggling many

plates." She says that a main concern is striking a balance among these multiple stakeholder

relationships.

> That's experience to me gained by having different jobs, going out and just gaining work
>
> experience. Oh, it's complex….you've got administration, the principal, you've got other
>
> teachers, you've got parents, you've got the school board, and then you have the kids,
>
> which is why you are there....you are juggling many plates....so, a lot of balance.
>
> Parents make up one group of the many stakeholders with which new teachers learn to

interact. Parents of children can influence the work routines of teachers and the school culture.

They do not work for the school or spend a great deal of time at the school, but they exert

considerable influence on the work of teachers. Although students are considered to be the

teachers' direct customers, parents play a strong role in the school. This issue triggers stress for

novice teachers, especially during their initial interactions with parents. Novice teachers seek out

information from more experienced teachers so as to better navigate the tricky waters of parent-

teacher interactions. Most participants recalled 'how to deal with parents' as a very challenging

task for a novice teacher to learn. They were not prepared for or experienced in this task before

they became professional teachers.

Ashley gives an example of how a parent can make her job difficult.

That's how it is here, that's why some teachers don't last because parents often come and

say "I want to see how you gave my kid grades." They confront teachers. They have high

teacher turnover, that's what you find in places like Smithville and Jonesville, and those

areas. The parents go and actually try to get teachers fired.

The previous paragraphs stress the importance of parents in schools, but the main

stakeholders for teachers in schools are the students. In this study, the participants based their

decision making on their students' needs. Even if the school or state policy mandates a certain

direction, if the participants believed that it was counter to their students' needs, then they would

tend to neglect the rules to follow their real beliefs. Hannah believes that finding students' needs

and filling their needs are teachers' responsibilities. She explains how novice teachers come to

understand these responsibilities over time.

Good teachers know what is useful, and what's not. Teachers know what's good for kids

because of the relationships. "Why do they not understand?" The relationships that help

new teachers survive and prove their craft are, "What's going to help kids to learn?"

School settings involve bureaucratic-style organizations because school districts have

highly hierarchical structures and teachers are supposed to follow rules. However, the

participants reveal that they are independent rule decision makers; that is, teachers make independent judgments to serve their students' needs. The participants note multiple stakeholder relationships, and they note that their practical tasks and work routines closely rely upon the principal, parents, and student stakeholders. Some of these work routines and tasks are considered to be the most challenging tasks by the participants, and some require significant assistance from their mentors. However, the ultimate decision makers regarding their work tasks are the participants themselves in the moment, even though their interactions involve multiple stakeholders. Given the ambiguities and complexities of their roles and their work environments, novice teachers seek out and interpret work-related information from their environments that can help them make sound judgments. In the next section, participants describe how the isolated nature of teaching affects their interactions with others.

Isolated Environment

School settings have been characterized as work settings of isolation and individualism (Hargreaves, 1992; Flores, 2004). However, teachers explore and discover pathways for finding work-related information that can help them with their daily routines and job tasks. For example, participants in this study explain that teachers in the same grade level are able to get together to share ideas, swap materials, and/or team-teach. Isabella describes interactions among teachers at the same level, even though they teach in different schools.

> Well there are always, I think, little factions in larger school settings like this. It was very
> different in the building where there were only five of us. There really weren't any
> factions to perceive, but I think whenever you have a larger staff, when you are dealing
> with like 30, 40 people on the staff, you have certain groups that you know do things
> socially together.

The degree to which teachers can interact is affected by many variables, such as the size of the school, its policies and procedures, and the school climate. In some cases, an isolated physical environment and the school climate can create barriers to information sharing both physically and emotionally among teachers. Madison provides her viewpoints of these phenomena:

> I know teaching is such an isolated profession. When you get to school, you really don't know what's going on next door. You make your own business, too. Over the past, I had opportunities to team teach with other teachers where we really did get to see their styles and learn from it.

Sarah raises an internal problem that blocks the sharing of work-related information with her colleagues. According to her, even though it appears to be welcoming or friendly on the surface, the real culture of her school was not as it seemed. Her colleagues were uncomfortable with sharing and exposing their spaces, so they closed the doors.

> Probably, people in the building were friendly, and they seemed very welcoming, but they were not open. I never felt welcomed to go to them with problems and say "Hey, I don't know what to do about this."

The classrooms of the participants are basically self-contained. According to the participants, they mostly close their classroom doors, even after class. That is to say, the participants' work environments are physically isolated. However, they point out they are isolated not only physically but also psychologically. They believe that their colleagues are more comfortable working alone in closed self-contained classrooms. In the next section participants recall how groups of influential teachers influenced interactions among teachers.

"Core Group"

Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, (2001) describe two different school cultures that new teachers encounter: veteran-oriented and novice-oriented cultures. However, results of this study do not indicate novice-oriented cultures. Most participants of this study described a core-group culture within their work settings. It was typically comprised of a senior group of influential teachers. Aligned with the findings of this study, Schoonmaker (2002) describes teacher cultures as "notorious centers of gossip about children, their families, [and teachers]" (p. 108). The participants of this study describe one of these hidden cultural components, a core group which can strongly influence the nature of the work setting, and thus, affect the sharing of work-related information among novice and experienced teachers.

Abigail explains that there has always been a core group that has been dominant regardless of the school during her entire teaching career (35 years). Therefore, when teachers enter a school, the participants suggest digging into an important kind of work-related information -- finding out who are the people they should get along with or who they should avoid. This kind of work-related information can be difficult for new teachers to distinguish and interpret.

> That seniority culture, oh you learn that fast. I learned by observing that it exists in every single school, every school and every workplace. There is a little core group of people who are in there… they are sort of go to people. I mean if you want to know the gossip, you go to them. If you want to know the latest scoop on anything, you go to them, but also you know that if you don't want to be gossiped about, you stay away from them.

Hannah supports the notion that this core group is developed by a seniority culture. Teachers can stay at the same school for a long time, and the teachers who have senior status can

become a center group. Considering the work-related information that can be transferred from

person-to-person, the informants who provide the backdrop of this information automatically

stand on higher ground than the receiver; hence a seniority culture emerges. Novice teachers may

easily fall prey to this culture because they are ignorant of the culture's undercurrents. Hannah

emphasizes the importance of reading the culture and interpreting the hidden cultural

information:

> I think to be a good teacher you have to read the culture. You have to read the other
>
> teachers and see what they are doing, see how they are behaving, see how they are fitting
>
> in so you know what to do and what not to do. I mean you just have to be a very good
>
> social observer. When I first went to that school, there was a certain table you never sat
>
> at, because that's where the old ladies sat at, played cards and smoked cigarettes during
>
> lunch. This is a long time ago! They would give you the eye or they would like let you
>
> know non-verbally that you couldn't sit there.

> According to the participants, the core group culture is commonly connected to political

issues that exist in schools. Based on the participants' narratives, trust is a serious issue among

teachers. Novice teachers can struggle with interpreting who may be trusted within power circles

of the school setting; therefore, novice teachers may struggle with interpreting some of the work-

related information and making judgments about the information's utility for their work tasks

and daily routines.

The participants offer negative perceptions about the existence of core group cultures in

schools. They believe that senior teachers dominate the atmosphere of a school, and novice

teachers are required to implicitly read those hidden cultures. From these readings, novice

teachers try to determine the usefulness and applicability of work-related information that they

glean from their interactions with these core groups. The participants warn that novice teachers

should carefully assess the nature of core groups. On the one hand they can be a good source of

useful work-related information, but on the other hand they can be sources of gossip or dissent.

In the next section participants describe how the ages of select stakeholders of school settings

can affect how novice teachers access work-related information.

Age Culture

The participants describe an age culture in schools that has a different meaning from

seniority culture. The age culture can be revealed between teachers and parents, or among

teachers themselves. The participants explain a tendency to get along with stakeholders within

similar age groups. Age seems to be relevant to the participants when they connect with others to

share information in school or build personal relationships that are relevant to their jobs.

Hannah shares her experiences of how the age issue influenced personal relationships in

the school.

> Happy hour! There are a lot of happy hours on Friday nights. There's a place that they go
>
> to, and one of the teachers had a swimming party to get together this summer. But these
>
> teachers are a lot younger than the ones that I was working with in Blakeville. Those
>
> were mostly older veteran teachers....I was a lot younger than most of them, and I got
>
> married during that first semester that I taught here. I had no children, so I didn't have
>
> that in common with any other teachers. I think it was just the age gap.

Olivia's age affected how others perceived her teaching expertise. Olivia's beliefs were

rejected in the school context because of her relatively young age. This age factor is not limited

to interactions with teachers or administrators, according to Olivia it also influences parents'

perceptions of the skills and abilities of novice teachers.

That was one of my biggest challenges, of course. When you are a first year teacher they

don't respect your opinions as much as if you are teaching for say ten years. Then they

assume that maybe you do know what you are talking about, so I think I ran into that as a

first year teacher, too. I wasn't always respected and believed by either administration or

parents. I think that it takes a while to learn. Another dynamic is you know when you are

in your twenties and the parents are in their thirties, they tend to think that they know

more than you do just because they are older, so as you get older that automatically

changes.

This preceding finding is aligned with the research of Day, Johnson, Chen, Wallace, and

Ricketts (2010). For example, they note that younger teachers are more likely to experience

parental aggression than some of their teaching counterparts.

Synthesizing the participants' narratives, the age level is very important for the novice

teachers to select a group with which to share their time and work-related information. The

participants recalled how they were most comfortable sharing time with similarly aged people.

This age culture limits novice teachers from developing in their jobs because they limit their

span of influence in regard to other teachers, principals, or parents. In the next section,

participants describe their interpretations of mandatory volunteer work within the context of their

schools.

Mandatory Volunteering for Work

According to deMarrais and LeCompte (1999), schools are very special organizations

that consist of a lot of unwritten job expectations that are not depicted by official job

descriptions. Connell (1985) also pinpoints this characteristic by describing teaching as a process

of labor that does not have an object. For example, teachers are commonly expected to balance

heavy committee duties beyond their established workloads. Committee work is a volunteer job, but the participants of this study were implicitly expected to volunteer as novice teachers regardless of their willingness. The participants view committee roles as a political or fitting-in strategy to visibly show they are filling the expectations held for novice teachers within the school.

Chloe did not know that several committee duties are included in the teaching profession before she graduated from college. Chloe explains how she eventually took on committee work in her school.

> You don't really know about this when you leave college. There is committee work that you are expected to participate in….the building committee and district committee and curriculum committee and school improvement plan....You are not forced to do it, but you are expected to do it, encouraged strongly (laugh) to go ahead and make sure that you are doing it. That's a part of being a team member at the school. Everybody has to take on some of those things.

The participants volunteered for several committees as a means of fitting in, but they explain that they took on those tasks as an unwritten expectation of the school culture. They did not know this cultural component before they entered the schools, but they came to learn these expectations through the socialization processes. The participants used the contexts of the committees as useful and meaningful places to expand their insights about their schools; that is, they were able to access work-related information and learn things about their schools that were unattainable within their classrooms.

In the next section, participants explain the importance of novice teachers learning about additional types of informal work relationships that can affect their success with daily routines and performing their work tasks.

Get on the Good Side of Support Staff

Finally, participants explain an implicit type of work information that resides in the schools. The participants commonly emphasize one component that is not directly relevant to teaching but that significantly affects their daily routines and performance of their job tasks: good relationships with custodians and secretaries. On the surface, secretaries and custodians do not appear to be vital to a novice teacher's success because they are not in decision making positions that directly influence the teachers' jobs. As a result, novice teachers might easily overlook the significance of these relationships. However, the participants acquired this work-related information either from family members who were teachers or other teachers who cared about their welfare. In other words, those who have worked in schools understand the importance of these relationships. For example, Madison's father (and educator) helped her become aware of this hidden cultural factor:

> My dad said to me when I became a teacher, "You know, Madison, I want to tell you who the most important people in the school are: the custodian and the secretary. (laughing) They run the school, and really, they are part of the family at our school, they really are."

Ashley specifically explains how custodians or secretaries can affect teachers in the school. She also gives some tips of how to be conscious about these factors in school life.

> Your contact is always the secretary, so you need to know Secretaries' Day or you always need to take care of your secretary because the secretary is the one who decides if you get

messages or you don't get messages. If you need something, they are the ones who know where it is.

You have to be conscious of the janitor. If you do not clean your room or something happened to your classroom, they may take the time to come to see you, or if you need something to be fixed, they are going to take the time. So you need to cover your context and make sure that you get them cards for Christmas or whatever. Just be conscious of them because they are not teachers but they are very important as far as your success.

The participants are conscious of this hidden cultural component that makes their tasks easier or helps them become successful teachers. They have specific strategies on how to deal with this work-related information, and they agree on its importance for novice teachers.

The preceding sections highlighted the predominant themes that emerged from the data. Although school environments may vary from school to school and district to district, based on the participants' narratives, these common thematic findings are representative of the types of work-related information embedded in school contexts. From these contexts the participants depict types of work-related information from which they learned as novice teachers. In summary, a school consists of multiple stakeholder relationships, and teachers' workplaces are isolated not only physically but also psychologically. A "core group" can significantly influence the overall atmosphere of a school, and an age culture can also exist in the school. The participants describe the importance of mandatory volunteer work. And finally, they note the importance of establishing good relationships with school staff members. For these participants, accessing and learning from these types of work-related information occurred over time and through different channels.

Discussion, Concluding Thoughts, and Suggestions for Future Research

The participants of this study believe that teaching is a lengthy and endless learning process. They believe that their established routines and work tasks are affected by multiple factors, and broad capabilities are needed to successfully carry out these tasks. The participants of this study explain that developing an understanding of the school setting helped them to seek out work-related information and to learn from it, and nuances of the school culture can facilitate or obstruct information sharing among teachers.

School settings are characterized by a number of features that coexist, such as being comparing and competitive, autonomous and hierarchical, individualistic and collaborative, silent and interactive. As Flores (2004) notes, school environments are commonly very paradoxical, and no two of them are exactly alike. Therefore, the approaches for accessing work-related information and learning from it will probably vary from one school to the next. An important finding of this study is that teachers' contexts are dominated by unwritten or implicit information. Therefore, novice teachers who tend to look only at the surface can become frustrated trying to figure out why things are done the way they are done in a school. Because novice teachers may not understand the backdrop of this information and are unable to interpret it, they try to seek logic in experienced teachers' performance. However, confusion can set in for them as they become immersed in a school culture that they may not understand.

Schools can be heavily influenced by bureaucratic organizational structure; however, several of the participants of this study emerged as rule-independent decision makers for which their bottom-line criteria were their students' needs. In this study, unlike what Flores (2004) describes, the participants demonstrated that unless they had common beliefs or philosophy, collaboration and commitment to each other was not likely to occur.

This study provides school-based contexts from which experienced teachers reflected on work-related information, some barriers and pathways for accessing it, and personal learning that was connected to it. The narratives of these teachers provide insights regarding the types of work-related information that can help novice teachers succeed in their entry to the profession. This study relied on the abilities of experienced teachers to accurately recall their time as novice teachers. However, confidence in the accuracy of their recollections is based in the premise that teaching is a reflective practice.

Additional studies could be conducted that are based on the reflections of novice teachers who are engaged in acquiring work-related information. Studies could be conducted on the learning-in-action that is based on recently accessed work-related information. Comparative studies can be conducted that examine the barriers and catalysts to information sharing among novice teachers and experienced teachers across disciplines and other boundaries that exist within school systems.

A limitation of this study is that its participants taught at middle to upper-middle class schools. Findings may have been considerably different, for example, if participants had been socialized as novice teachers in urban schools in poor neighborhoods. Therefore, additional studies are recommended that can broaden this line of inquiry to other types of school settings. Finally, additional research is encouraged that can provide new conceptual frameworks for examining work-related information. Research is needed that can be easily interpreted by novice teachers who are trying to access work-related information and learn from it. The high attrition rate of novice teachers is a well known problem in the profession. Additional research is needed that can help novice teachers read cues in their work settings and survive their early professional struggles.

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