

Unpacking Practice: Using Structured Evaluation as a Tool for Mentoring Beginning Special Education Teachers



Beginning Special Education Teachers

- Concerns
 - ▣ Inclusion, collaboration & interactions with adults
 - ▣ Pedagogical concerns
 - ▣ Managing and organizing work
- Pressure for High Quality (Effective) and Retention



Induction as Support

- In 2008, 48 states had an induction or mentoring rule, policy or program (Hirsch et al., 2009).
- Conventional wisdom
 - ▣ induction = support for beginners



Research

- Special Education Induction (Billingsley et al., 2009)
 - ▣ Program goals, length, funding
 - ▣ Mentoring as support

- Limitations
 - Based primarily on teacher and mentor satisfaction
 - Mixed finding linking induction to teacher quality and student achievement (e.g., IES study; Fletcher, Strong & Villar, 2008).

Mentoring Focus

- Mentoring is the main vehicle of support for beginning teachers
 - Research focuses on:
 - Activities
 - Selection/characteristics
 - Mentoring training
 - Meeting frequency
 - Mentor proximity
 - Topics of support

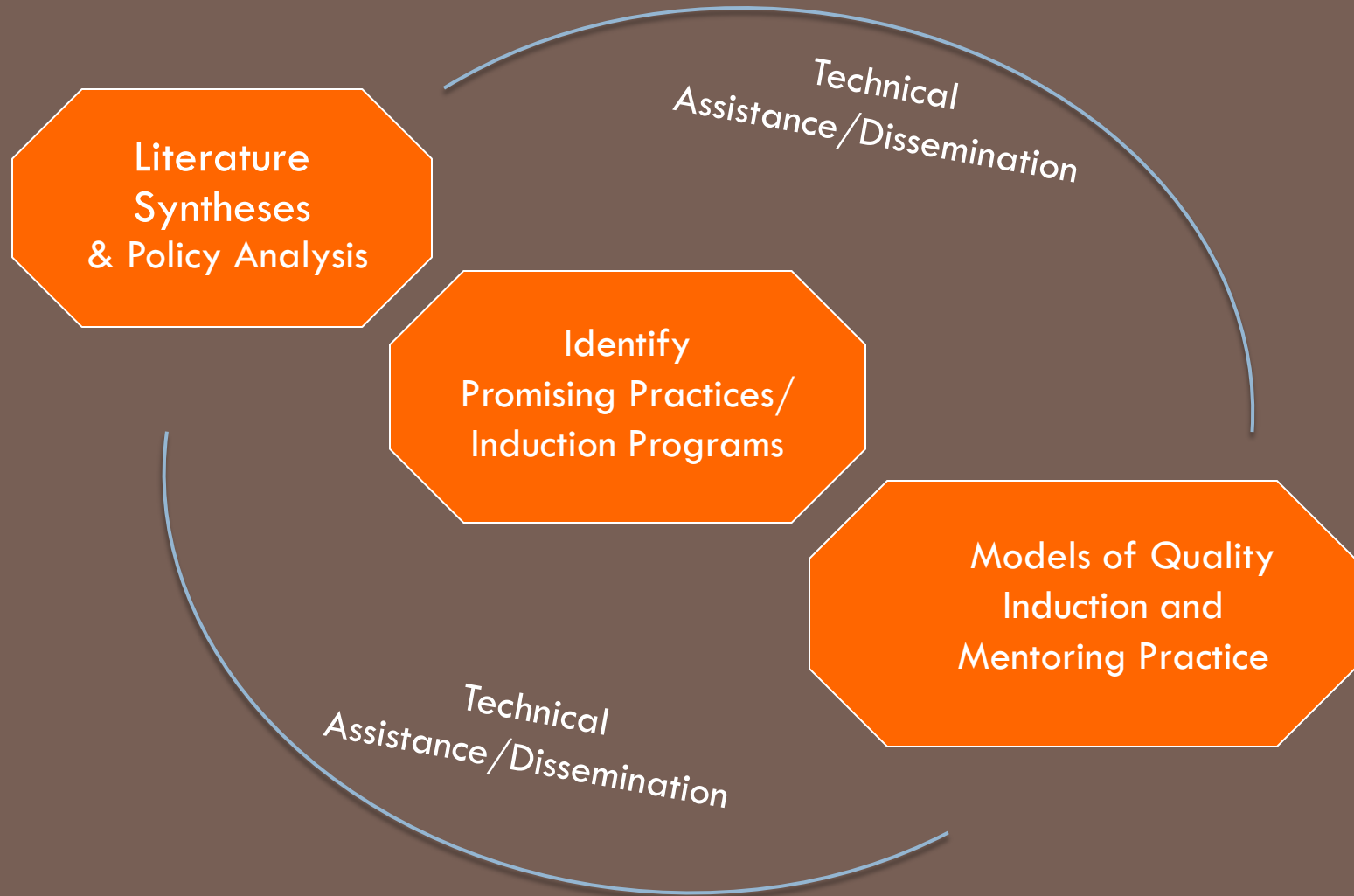
(Billingsley et al., 2009)

The Black Box of Mentoring

- No research exists about what goes on in mentoring conversations
- Loose intervention lacking consistency



- To improve teacher quality and increase commitment to teaching students with disabilities by
 - ▣ informing special education policy and practice on induction and mentoring
 - ▣ identifying and recommending induction and mentoring implementation strategies



Research Question

- What goes on in high quality mentoring conversations?
 - ▣ How does using a structured evaluation assist mentors in planning and implementing mentoring conversations?

Research Design

- Participants
 - 16 beginning teachers
 - 5 Consulting Teachers (mentors)
 - 1 program director
 - 6 principals
- Data Sources
 - Interviews
 - Videos of Mentoring Sessions and Classroom Practice
 - Artifacts (teacher evaluation, lesson plans)

Cincinnati

- Ohio's 3rd largest school district
 - 58 schools
 - Largely African American (68.8%)
 - Close to 70% eligible for free/reduced-price lunch
 - 22% served in special education
 - Strong teacher union

Induction

- Developed in 1985
- Two main components
 - ▣ Consulting Teacher (mentor and evaluator)
 - ▣ Practicum

Practicum

- 11 sessions
 - Bi-monthly in fall
 - Monthly in spring
- Specific to special education
 - Application of placemat to instruction
 - Break out by content, level and disability
 - Collaboration with general education

Consulting Teachers

- Rigorous selection
 - Lead teacher
 - Written application
 - Classroom observation
 - Interview
 - Perform at accomplished level on evaluations
 - References
 - 40% pass
- Maximum caseload of 14 new teachers
- 2 informal, 2 formal observations/evaluations
- Plan and implement practicum sessions

Placemat

- Fifteen standards
 - Adapted from Danielson's framework
- Ratings
 - Unsatisfactory
 - Basic
 - Proficient
 - Accomplished
 - Beginners must be basic in all standard areas or are non-renewed

Preliminary Findings

- Placemat grounds mentoring conversations
 - Focuses mentor planning
 - Focuses conversations
 - Creates consistency and expectations
 - Focuses on instruction, observation and direct feedback
- Challenges with placemat focus
 - Mentor Role – mentor and evaluator
 - Support outside placemat
 - Lack of school based support

Placemat: Focus for planning

- Mentors use the placemat to plan mentoring sessions



Placemat: Focuses conversations

- The Placemat provided an anchor for mentoring conversations



Placemat: Provides consistency and sets expectations

- Beginning teachers appreciated
 - Common language
 - Consistent expectations

“ So we talk about the rubric language of the placemat, then we talk about how that works for the teachers.” (CT)

“The language has been a very key piece. A lot of the things I was sort of doing on my own but because she gave me the language and explained things to me. You know, what does rigorous mean? What does ongoing mean? She helped me to set the skills that I had up to a more professional level. On the placemat you can receive 4, 3, 2 or 1 and she said I had to receive 2's in order to pass, but to strive for 4's. So if I got four 3's she would say, 'great now how can we get a 4?' and she would always push me.” (Beginning Teacher)

Placemat: Focus on instruction

- Conversations primarily focus on instructional practices
- Discussion around observation
- Majority of conversations include direct feedback

“I think one of the biggest things I do is look at the placemat. Feedback is not ‘Good job or Great.’ I know that they’ve heard that quite a bit. What we give is specific.” (CT)

Challenge: Mentor Role

- Mentors provided little emotional support
- Role Conflict: mentor and evaluator

“ I don’t want to be intimidating at all. I am here to help and support you where you feel you need it or where I see you maybe can use the support.”

CT

“Again I can’t ask if it’s a personal issue and they start to divulge information I am not at liberty to say, ‘Well tell me more about that’ because that is not where I want to be. And when those doors kind of open and you walk in... I don’t think they see me in the role that I’m in and that’s to evaluate.” CT

Challenge: Support Beyond Placemat

- Some beginners felt limited by the placemat
- Restricted to placemat issues

“The things that are strictly on the placemat are things that we can evaluate. We can only base our evaluations on the placemat.” (CT)

“I think there was way way way too much focus on the rubric.” (Beginner)

Challenge: Lack of School Based Support

- No assigned school based support
 - ▣ Beginners in supportive schools found informal mentor
 - ▣ Beginners in more challenging contexts were left alone

“My case coordinator she’s awesome. Her door is always open. Sometimes I’ve had a couple of really tough times or tough meetings and I was able to go to her and say look, I’m doing everything that I can.”
(Beginner in supportive school)

“I didn’t feel as if my in school environment was hearing me. I would ask that question and nobody could give me a clear answer...I went to two of them and kept asking. She said she would help, but would never show up to help or guide or to answer questions.” (Beginner in challenging context)

Conclusions

- Another example of Danielson's framework being used to provide support to beginning SETs with some success
- Mentor/evaluator selection and training is important
- Ongoing PD important for all, critical for some
- Using a third-point focus (i.e., placemat) to structure objective, measurable performance
- Provides common language and consistency across mentor/evaluators and time
- Structure maybe too limiting for some and exclude other forms of support (i.e., social-emotional; school-based support)

Questions

