

## **Growing New Teachers' Self-Efficacy to Improve New Teacher Retention in High-Poverty, High-Minority Schools**

Barbara R. Kimzey

### **Introduction**

High teacher turnover in high-poverty, high-minority schools has persistently negatively impacted school reform efforts aimed at closing the achievement gap for the students they serve (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). Teacher turnover in high poverty schools was almost twice as high when compared to lower poverty schools according to Ingersoll (2002), who cited the Teacher Followup Survey conducted by the Bureau of National Affairs (1998). Additionally, teacher turnover among teachers who are considered new to the profession (five or fewer years of service) remains at about 50% (Ingersoll, 2004). Since effective teachers have the greatest direct impact upon improving student achievement, high teacher turnover rates in low-performing schools that serve large populations of minority and low-income students could be assumed to help perpetuate the low performance of those schools (Ingersoll, 2002; Stronge 2010; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Thus, finding ways to support teachers in order to prevent their either leaving high-poverty, high-minority schools or leaving the profession altogether, remains key in helping close the achievement gap for minority students and students in poverty. As this review of the research in supporting new teachers will show, ensuring that new teachers work in an environment in which they effective, individualized professional development and coaching supports should increase their self-efficacy, resulting in a reduction in teacher turnover.

### **Teacher Turnover**

Teacher turnover in schools may result from either attrition, which refers to teachers leaving the profession, or migration, in which teachers choose to move to another school. Teacher turnover, whether due to attrition or migration, results in the school having to recruit and train replacement teachers, which carries a large expense and also

contributes to a “revolving door” termed by Ingersoll that prevents hard-to-staff high-poverty schools from improving student achievement (Ingersoll, 2002; National Center for Teaching and America’s Future, 2007).

The teacher turnover “revolving door” is acute for high-poverty, high-minority schools, and continues to thwart efforts to improve student achievement in high-poverty, high-minority schools that are underperforming (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). For the purposes of this review of the literature, high-poverty refers to schools having 70% or more of their students receiving free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the term high-minority refers to a school’s student body that is composed of over 70% minority students. These minority groups include African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and other groups considered to be a minority population by the US government. Additionally, as high-poverty, high-minority schools tend to have higher numbers of new teachers (those with five or fewer years in the profession), this review of the literature focused specifically upon new teacher retention.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Between 40% and 50% of new teachers, defined for the purposes of this review as teachers within their first five years of teaching, choose to leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2002). Additionally, Planty (2008), in a review of nation-wide teacher attrition data conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics, reported that the percentage of new teachers leaving high-poverty schools was significantly larger than new teachers leaving lower-poverty schools (21% vs. 14%). Thus, teacher attrition in high-poverty, high-minority schools remains a critical problem.

Having new teachers leave schools in such high numbers significantly hampers efforts to

establish a consistent, quality instructional program in order to improve student achievement (Ado, 2013; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2004; Stronge, 2010). However, not only does teacher attrition result in academic losses for students, the estimated monetary cost associated with replacing teachers who leave the profession prematurely is \$7.3 billion yearly (National Center for Teaching and America's Future, 2007). Therefore, stemming the flow of new teachers choosing to leave the profession remains a critical component in systematically working to improve student achievement in high-poverty, high-minority schools.

### **Teacher Migration**

Though traditionally teacher turnover had been attributed to attrition, Ingersoll (2002), in his study examining reasons for the perceived teacher shortage, asserted that high-poverty, urban schools were not suffering from what was commonly understood to be a teacher shortage due to attrition. He examined data that went beyond statistics that simply showed that teachers had left a school. Instead, he analyzed data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics that included the School Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) to determine where teachers went or what they did after they left a school. Ingersoll found that hard-to-staff schools suffered more from teacher migration to other schools or districts where teacher job satisfaction was higher than from attrition. He described a “revolving door” in these schools, where teacher turnover was so high that “ostensibly, an entire staff could change within a school in only a short number of years” (p. 1). Given that these schools would then have a greater percentage of new-to-the-profession teachers, a negative impact upon student achievement could be expected. In fact, first-year teachers tend to exhibit less instructional expertise, resulting in persistently low student achievement, which then fuels the pernicious cycle of underachievement for underperforming schools (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011).

### **The Cause of Teacher Turnover**

The bulk of teacher turnover results from teachers' dissatisfaction with working conditions in the school (Ingersoll, 2002). When analyzing the underlying reasons teachers who left provided for their dissatisfaction with working conditions, teachers in Ingersoll's (2002) study “cited low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the causes of their leaving” (p. 26). Some of these reasons point to teachers' reporting a lack of support from others, as in teachers' citing lack of administrative support. However, the majority of the teachers' stated underlying causes for leaving pointed to the departing teachers' sense that the problems they encountered were not under their direct influence or control, which then relates directly to a teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to the degree to which a person believes that he or she can affect an outcome. For teachers in the school environment, their sense of self-efficacy relies upon their belief that they affect changes in their classrooms with their students. As noted previously, the data Ingersoll (2002) analyzed revealed that teacher turnover resulted from conditions such as student discipline and teachers' sense that they had no input in decisions that affected them. These teachers did not believe that they could affect changes in their students and their schools.

Therefore, a teacher's belief that he or she can affect student learning lies at the center of determining how to reduce new teacher turnover from high-poverty, high-minority schools. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) found that “greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, which leads to better performance, which in turn leads to greater efficacy” (p. 234). As teachers gain mastery experiences, they build their sense of self-efficacy further affecting their performance.

Thus, teachers who believe they can affect students' learning will persist, which theoretically should then result in greater student achievement, which will then further inform the teacher's sense of self-efficacy. When teachers in Ingersoll's (2002) study cited low levels of student motivation and discipline problems, their lower sense of self-efficacy was evident in their reasoning, as they clearly did not believe that they could affect their students' motivation or behaviors. If teachers do not believe that they can affect students' learning, this belief then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **Self-Efficacy and Teacher Retention**

Additionally, self-efficacy has been linked with teachers' commitment to professional development, to their retention, and to student achievement, among other factors (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). The ongoing line of research into the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher retention has underlined the direct relationship between teachers with low self-efficacy tending to either leave teaching altogether or to burnout. For example, Brown (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining teacher turnover and teacher burnout and found that teachers with low self-efficacy were more apt to experience burnout or to leave the profession. Burnout results from stress, and "represents teachers' negative responses to the mismatch between job requirements and their perceived abilities (Tan et al., 2001 as cited in Brown 2012, p. 48). These "perceived abilities" are directly related to the teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

One concept resulting from Brown's (2012) research into the relationship between self-efficacy and teacher burnout identified these teachers' *depersonalization*, meaning that the teachers with low self-efficacy did not feel connected with their school organization, with their colleagues, or with their students. Such depersonalization resulted in either burnout, wherein the affected teachers were no longer effective in their jobs, or teacher attrition. This sense of depersonalization could be compared with Ado's (2013) and Johnson's (2011) findings that the new teachers in their case studies cited needing a social network of colleagues for support

and guidance in order to improve their practice and develop resilience when confronted with challenges. This social network, when present for teachers in these studies, served as the teachers' connection with their school. The teachers who continued working in their original schools cited these networks as key to their retention and to their sense that they were making a difference for their students.

### **Supporting New Teachers to Improve Retention**

Since the research clearly identifies the correlation between new teachers with high self-efficacy and their tendency to persist in teaching, educators must develop ways to help support novice teachers in order to reduce teacher attrition and what Ingersoll (2002) termed the "revolving door" by helping them increase their sense of self-efficacy during those crucial early years of teaching. Therefore, a review of research of best practices for supporting new teachers, with an emphasis upon identifying specific practices to help new teachers grow their personal sense of self-efficacy in their specific context follows.

The context in which new teachers work remains a critical element in identifying best practices for supporting new teachers in order to significantly improve retention. Though generalized research in new teacher induction exists, the research remains inconclusive regarding what supports are most effective for teachers in high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools (Johnson, 2011). Johnson (2011) and Ado (2013) both conducted case studies examining new teacher retention in high-poverty, high-minority schools. The case study method allowed the researchers to account for the complex work environments in which new teachers find themselves.

For example, Johnson (2011) noted that these schools include contextual factors that are not present in low-poverty, low-minority schools, and these factors may include "student-to-student cultural/racial conflicts, differentiating instruction for diverse learners, low student motivation, pacing, language, and student resistance to academic culture" (p. 149). Therefore, support to novice

teachers in these contexts requires targeted support to encourage teachers' development in these areas as Ado (2013) reported that teachers must have a "sense of success" or they will change schools to find schools that match their skill set (p. 136). This "sense of success" directly correlates with the teacher's sense of self-efficacy in the high-poverty, high-minority context.

### **Growing Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy**

Teachers base their perception of their own self-efficacy upon these factors originally identified by Bandura (1977 as cited in Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009):

Verbal encouragement of important others such as colleagues, supervisors, and administrators (verbal persuasion), the success or failure of other teachers who serve as models (vicarious experiences), perceptions of past experiences of teaching (mastery experiences), and the level of emotional physiological arousal experienced as they anticipate and practice teaching (p. 229).

Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found in their study of early elementary school teachers implementing a new reading instructional strategy that professional development that included mastery experiences and follow-up coaching provided the greatest effect upon raising teachers' self-efficacy. However, the researchers noted that some teachers in the study experienced reductions in self-efficacy after implementation, resulting in their conclusions that influencing self-efficacy remains a highly complex process that needs further study.

Collective efficacy refers to a faculty's collective sense that they affect the student achievement in their schools. Though increased teachers' self-efficacy does not necessarily result in greater collective efficacy of the faculty as a whole, self-efficacy and collective efficacy are related constructs. In fact, growing teachers' collective efficacy may also increase teachers' self-efficacy, which then positively impacts their performance and student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, Salloum, & Goddard, 2014). Research suggests that

supporting new teachers in developing their sense of self-efficacy and collective efficacy may encourage them to remain in high-poverty, high-minority environments (Ado, 2013; Johnson, 2011).

### **Increasing Collaboration to Improve Collective Efficacy and Self-Efficacy**

Johnson (2011), in her discussion of how to support novice teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools in order to prevent teacher migration asserted, "collaboration, when offered, was a vital tool in improving the practice of these teachers" (p. 145). She also cited Wong and Asquith (2012) who found that teachers who are part of a high-functioning larger community of teacher learners tend to stay in their teaching contexts. These findings led to Johnson's conclusion that

New teachers may be more likely to stay in the profession and in their schools when they work in an *integrated professional culture* that promotes frequent and reciprocal interaction among faculty members across experience levels, recognizes new teachers' needs as beginners and develops shared responsibility among teachers for the school (p. 147).

Johnson's finding echoes that of Freedman and Appleman (2009) where they found that creating a social collaborative network for each cohort of novice teachers resulted in improved teacher retention over the five-year period of their study. Freedman and Appleman also found that ensuring that novice teachers internalize the mission for their schools, develop persistence, become reflective, and develop a belief that they are agents of change in their schools was critical in their decisions to remain in their original school contexts. All of these attributes relate to novice teachers' growing their sense of connection with their schools as they develop collective efficacy with their teaching colleagues along with their own personal sense of self-efficacy. A key part of self-efficacy and collective self-efficacy remains teachers' beliefs that they individually and collectively as a whole have the ability and responsibility to

positively influence student behavior and achievement (Ado, 2013; Brown, 2012; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). This belief then correlates with novice teachers' decisions to remain in their schools of context.

### **The Role of the Principal**

If creating an “integrated professional culture” (Johnson, 2011) remains a critical component to ensuring that new teachers choose to remain in high-poverty, high-minority schools, then the principal plays a critical role in creating that collaborative culture and in growing the sense of collective efficacy through fostering a positive climate and culture of collaboration and structuring the school around that collaboration (Ado, 2013; Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Johnson, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, et al, 2014). Teachers tend to stay in schools where they play a critical role in making school-wide decisions and designing professional development to meet their individual needs (Boyd, et al., 2011). Likewise, Ingersoll (2002) found that teachers wanted to have input in decisions that affected them. Additionally, new teachers who left their schools cited lack of support from administrators as a major contributing factor to their departure (Ado, 2013; Ingersoll 2002; Johnson, 2011). This support could be with student discipline, identifying effective instructional methods, dealing with parents, and other tasks related to the teacher's role. Therefore, principals must consciously create a culture of shared leadership and decision-making in their schools.

Principals may foster the growth of collective efficacy and individual teachers' self-efficacy through professional development. For example, in order to provide powerful mastery experiences for teachers, Tschannen-Moran and Chen (2014) suggested “experiences that result in quick wins, early successes, and relevant evidence of student learning, both for individual and collective units” (p. 258). Additionally, Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found that mastery experiences, followed by coaching sessions, yielded more significant gains in increasing teachers' self-

efficacy. Thus, principals must not only individually tailor professional development to each novice teacher's needs, but also strategically choose experiences that will build upon new teachers' skills so that they experience positive results, which will then continue to build their self-efficacy. Creating time in the school day for coaching conversations, based upon the research from Tschannen-Moran and McMaster, also could prove powerful in growing teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Additionally, principals can organize the school to ensure time for teacher collaboration in teams to ensure new teachers have time to collaborate not only with other novice peers, but also teachers with a variety of experiences and at a variety of experience levels (Boyd, et al, 2011; Johnson, 2011). They also must use their position to verbalize their belief that all students can and will learn, in addition to their belief that their teachers can affect positive behaviors and academic achievement in their students, and convince their faculty and staff of those same beliefs (Tschannen-Moran & Chen, 2014). Furthermore, in order to provide novice teachers with experiences even before they have those experiences for themselves, Tschannen-Moran and Chen (2014) suggested that principals ensure that new teachers have the opportunity to observe more experienced teachers. As part of that effort, new teachers should have collaborative time with those teachers, and the emphasis should be upon how to cope when teachers encounter difficulties. This emphasis helps new teachers understand the reflective nature and realities of teaching, helping replace their idealistic views with realistic ones that still allow for persistence, resilience, and hopefulness (Johnson, 2011).

In order to increase collective efficacy, principals can provide examples of schools with similar demographics and challenges, along with sharing their success stories with their staffs (Tschannen-Moran & Chen, 2014). Most importantly, principals cannot afford to ignore that they must set a positive tone for their schools. Teachers are humans and are directly affected by their own emotions, along with the emotions of those around them, and as Tschannen-Moran and

Chen stated, “Positive emotional states generate more positive emotional states, which can, in turn, bolster a group’s sense of collective efficacy for learning and success” (p. 259).

### Conclusion

In order to stem the tide of teacher turnover, principals and schools must make changes in how they support new teachers through effective professional development and coaching designed to build teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and the school’s collective efficacy. Novice teachers who leave the profession do not believe that they have the ability to affect positive changes in their students’ academic learning and behaviors. As a result, their lack of belief in their own abilities results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, which contributes to perpetuating the achievement gap for high-poverty, high-minority students.

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