New Teachers' Network: A University-Based Support System for Educators in Urban and Suburban "Ethnic Minority" School Districts

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Abstract

The Hofstra University New Teachers' Network offers a model for university-based support for new classroom teachers in urban and suburban minority communities. It is rooted in relationships that develop during preservice teacher education programs, separate from district and school-based teacher development programs connected to hierarchical systems of supervision and bureaucratic constraints, and maintained through interconnections between university and secondary school classrooms, peer mentoring, regular support meetings, conferences, e-mail contact, and involvement in professional activities.

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During the last two decades, politicians, business executives, school administrators and academics have advanced numerous recommendations for reforming teacher education, extending staff development activities, and improving education in urban and "ethnic minority" school districts. However, despite the quantity of research and the number of proposals (Zeichner, 1999) prescriptions for enhancing teacher preparation follow two primary, overlapping models.

An institutional model calls for formal partnerships involving schools of education; professional, civic and business associations; and state education departments and school districts. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCT&AF), and the Holmes Group advocate this approach (Abdal-Haqq, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Holmes Group, 1995; NCT&AF, 1996; Young, 1990). It links a demand for higher standards and greater teacher accountability with the creation of site-based teacher development programs at designated professional development schools. An alternative model proposes an independent university role that focuses on extending and enhancing preservice teacher preparation. Extended preparation includes examining theoretical approaches to pedagogy (including critical approaches), discussing teachers as social change agents, practicing action research, examining ideas for promoting diversity, and additional field work (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Most proposals for reforming teacher education and enhancing staff development attempt to combine the idea of partnership with expanded preservice preparation of teachers. The NCT&AF (1996) advocates a plan to "reinvent teacher preparation and professional development" that includes extended, graduate-level teacher-preparation programs which provide year-long internships in professional development schools and mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Similarly, the Holmes Group promotes creating professional development schools that will immerse teacher education candidates in public school classrooms, provide experienced mentors for preservice and beginning teachers, and professional development opportunities for veteran teachers. The mentoring relationship is at the core of their model; mentors help preservice and new teachers master productive approaches to teaching and "socializ[e] them to new professional norms" (Young, 1990).

Instead of merely combining these two approaches, we advocate another model for university involvement in teacher education that focuses on supporting new teachers through the development of independent New Teacher Networks, or learning communities, that include beginning teachers and university faculty from school of education programs. We believe this model, with which we have experimented for the past five years, better incorporates the essential features of standard approaches. This model is intensive and continuous, yet it is independent of institutional control and job evaluation. In addition, because teacher networks can be responsive to contextual and situational problems, they provide opportunities for creating a more realistic approach (Korthagen &

Kessels, 1999) to teacher education pedagogy: an integrative, contextual approach that facilitates the connection of theory and practice.

The New Teachers' Network (NTN), a university-based support network at Hofstra University, provides a safe, yet sometimes confrontational, forum that successfully engages new teachers in conversations and in activities that rejuvenate them in their efforts to make a difference in urban and minority schools in the New York City metropolitan area. The key components of this learning community include multi-layered mentoring, collaborative teams and partnerships, and professional involvement. These goals are facilitated through meetings, school and classroom visits, professional conferences, and an e-mail network. With its egalitarian ethos and because of the efforts of teacher educators, experienced and new teachers, preservice students, and students at cooperating schools, this network provides the "extra" intellectual and affective curriculum to guide and empower new teachers through their challenging first few years.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Numerous questions have been raised about these institutional partnerships, the quality of mentoring practices under existing institutional arrangements, and the authenticity of professional development schools. Ballou and Podgursky (1999) argue that partnership proposals transfer significant control over education from the public domain to private organizations without any proof of a positive impact on teaching. In the schools themselves, questions arise as to whether school and district administrators are willing and able to challenge the existing institutional arrangements and the myriad of political forces they are subject to in systems that are most often top-down structures (Lipman, 1998).

The Holmes Group's premise, that institutions and administrators rooted in a system are free to and capable of changing it, is arguable. Feiman-Nemser, Parker and Zeichner (1993) have questioned whether the mentoring process will simply promote conventional norms and practices. Cochran-Smith (1991) and Cohen, McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) suggest that administrators who are committed to maintaining existing educational practices will undermine the kind of conceptually- oriented, learner-center teaching that is advocated by reformers. Labaree (1995), perhaps the most consistent critic of the "rhetoric and the practical implications" emerging from the Holmes Group, argues that the group's "populist rhetoric presents an anti-intellectual vision of the education school that hopelessly undermines the credibility of the Holmes Group as a voice for educational reform" (p. 166).

In its third report, *Tomorrow's Schools of Education*, the Holmes Group (1995), itself, acknowledges problems emanating from earlier proposals for institutional partnerships revolving around the creation of professional development schools. The report charges:

The label 'PDS' has been slapped on to all kinds of schools that do not begin to approach what we had in mind at the beginning. The most dangerous result of this wave of imitation is that the copies threaten to devalue and drive-out the real currency. When nothing more than a school to which students are sent for their practice teaching automatically carries the designation PDS, the deepest and most radical intentions of this innovation fade away. (p. 79)

Schools of education, which were major advocates of the partnership movement, have been blamed for many public education problems. Public Agenda, a public policy advocacy organization, has accused schools of education of existing in ivy-towered isolation that makes them inappropriate agents for implementing educational reform (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). A 1997 survey found a sharp gulf between the ways that university-based teacher educators, parents and classroom teachers view education. The executive director of Public Agenda concluded that education professors were "out of sync." Sandra Feldman, President of the American Federation of Teachers, supported the findings of the study and stated, "Teachers always report that their college education hasn't prepared them for the realities of the classroom" (Sengupta, 1997).

The ability of universities to prepare preservice teachers effectively, acting either independently or in partnerships, has also been questioned by people working within schools of education. Ladson-Billings (1999) examined six teacher education programs considered exemplary for preparing teachers to address race and ethnicity in United States society in their classrooms and schools. Despite the efforts of these programs, Ladson-Billings concluded that "such work is difficult, if not impossible" (p. 240), and she cited Cochran-Smith, who compared "the process of constructing knowledge about race and teaching" in teacher education courses with building "a new boat while sitting in the old one, surrounded by rising waters" (p. 229).

UNIVERSITY-BASED NETWORKS THAT ARE INDEPENDENT AND CONTINUOUS

Lieberman (2000) argues for an approach to university-based support for teachers similar to the New Teachers' Network developed at Hofstra University. Lieberman believes that independent collaborative networks combine the key characteristics of successful school reform that Parker (1977) identified and was corroborated by McLaughin and Talbert (1993), Newmann and Wehlage (1995), and Lieberman and Grolnick (1996). These qualities include a strong commitment to an idea, a sense of shared purpose, a mixture of information-sharing and psychological support, the availability of facilitators who ensure broad participation and equal treatment, and an "egalitarian ethos." In addition, according to Lieberman, because they are "flexible, borderless, and innovative," networks "are particularly well suited to making use of new technology and institutional arrangements" (p. 221).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that teacher learning communities are vital for the production of "knowledge-of-practice" and have the potential to create new cultures that can both support teachers in their work and transform institutions. "Knowledge-of-practice" is based on the idea that "practice is more than practical, that inquiry is more than an artful rendering of teachers' practical knowledge," (p. 274) and that effective teaching requires a "transformed and expanded view of what 'practice' means" (p. 276). According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle, practitioners generate "knowledge-of-practice" when they "treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation" (p. 250). Korthagen and Kessels (1999) discuss a similar realistic approach to developing situated knowledge that begins with interrogating problems from everyday contexts and uses these interrogations to relate theory with practice.

Putnam and Borko (2000) advocate viewing teachers as learners rather than as workers or prospective workers, and advocate organizing teacher education experiences based on the situated and social nature of cognition—cognition that does not end with the completion of a preservice teacher education program. They propose a menu of teacher development approaches to create situated learning experiences that are powerful enough to transform a teacher's classroom practice. These approaches include conducting teacher education classes in public schools and encouraging practicing teachers to bring their experience to teacher education classes and staff development programs, and promoting weaving together learning with ongoing practice under university faculty direction. University faculty, rather than act as the institutional partners of school administrators committed to managing workers, would support "discourse communities for experienced teachers" that reshape the "instructional conversation" and challenge existing cultures that "do not value or support critical and reflective examination of teaching practice" (pp. 8-9).

THE NEW TEACHERS' NETWORK RESPONDS

Several years ago, graduates of the Hofstra University secondary education program challenged university faculty to help them to survive and thrive in their difficult first years of teaching. Alumni, who had chosen to work in urban or suburban ethnic minority school districts, felt that the university's program had prepared them to become beginning

teachers and had encouraged them to take positions in disadvantaged settings where they could advocate for students. However, once they had graduated, they were left on their own to navigate school systems and to figure out how to *really* teach. In their schools, they often felt isolated from and in opposition to other school personnel. In response to this challenge, university faculty volunteers, these alumni, and some veteran cooperating teachers developed a university-based network for new teachers with the specific mission of providing support for teachers working in urban and suburban ethnic minority school districts.

The NTN emphasizes a supportive community in which teachers participate as resources and partners rather than as employees, clients or students. The NTN philosophy is that teachers are understood to be learners who create knowledge and desire to be culturally responsive educators (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999) making a difference in the children's lives. The network is independent, intensive, continuous, and requires little administrative or financial overhead. In five years of operation, it has evolved to include bi-monthly meetings, semi-annual conferences, and an e-mail network. In addition to peer mentoring, new teachers also mentor preservice students and visit education classes. Formal and informal collaborations with schools include university faculty visits, which allow faculty to maintain relationships with participating classroom teachers, to work with secondary school students, and to continue research. The NTN is "in sync" with classroom teachers. The following sections demonstrate how the network addresses the needs of the new teachers, describes NTN activities, and presents NTN voices.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY: MENTORING, COLLABORATIONS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

As a collaborative community, the NTN provides participants with the opportunity to learn from each other through several structures that aid individuals and groups. The basic contact for NTN members is informal, bi-monthly Saturday morning meetings at the university. A core group of fifteen teachers, about one-third of whom are teachers of color, attend meetings, organize agendas, follow-up on "absentees," and recruit other members. Up to 50 people, including several university faculty members, may attend. The new teachers receive no credit or stipend for participating; neither do they pay tuition or fees (Evans, 1998; Gray, 1996). Some of the teachers remain in the group for years and mentor new members. University faculty who participate in the network are volunteers; the new teachers are their former students and student teachers. The network allows the university-based teacher educators to maintain relationships with urban and suburban ethnic minority school district classroom teachers, gives them opportunities to work with secondary school students, and provides topics for research.

The leadership of the NTN has been consistently diverse. Among the 28 active members who became cooperating teachers since achieving tenure in their school districts. There are 2 African American/Caribbean men, 5 African American/Caribbean women, 1 Latino, 1 woman whose family is from southern Asia, 9 European American men, 8 European American women, and 2 women of mixed ethnic background (Latina and European American).

In a supportive atmosphere, network members develop their "knowledge-of-practiced" as they examine their classrooms and share views about navigating school bureaucracies and controversial issues affecting local communities and education. Professional and personal concerns—sometimes generally held and sometimes individually traumatic—emerge during discussion. As teachers share stories at NTN meetings, members realize that others are exploring and reflecting on common issues. Participants recognize that they are free to discuss what is really on their minds without being judged. During the meetings, the university faculty ask questions to promote discussion. Occasionally, they draw connections between topics the new teachers discuss and issues being debated in the educational literature. They make no judgments; mostly they listen. At the end of meetings, the university faculty and the mentor teachers work with individuals and small groups of beginning teachers, reviewing curricular material and developing lesson plans.

This is a vital part of the program since many beginning teachers in urban schools are relegated to teaching subjects in which they have little or no prior preparation.

Other venues for sharing ideas about pedagogy and addressing problems in schools include regular e-mail exchanges, two annual professional conferences sponsored by the NTN at Hofstra University and the joint participation of members in other professional organizations. In the fall semester, content-based thematic conferences have focused on social and local history, promoting literacy in the content areas, and human rights. New teachers, mentor teachers, and cooperating teachers offer workshops and display exhibits of their students' work. In the spring, their conference focuses on classrooms and schools. Themes have addressed race, class, gender, and ethnicity in the classroom, creative maladjustment in schools (Kohl, 1994) and teacher activism. Between 100-200 participants usually attend each conference, including network members, their colleagues, and education students.

Members also helped to write and field-test an interdisciplinary curriculum guide on the Great Irish Famine that is part of the New York State Human Rights Curriculum. Teachers from 6 schools, and students in their classes, participated in an all-day Great Irish Famine Museum at Hofstra University where middle school and high school students presented exhibits, videotapes of performances, and research reports. The professional activities and extracurricular accomplishments of NTN members have been recognized in several articles in local newspapers, including articles on a literacy program for inner-city youth (Gonzalez, 1999), a successful mock trial team at a high school on the state's list of failing schools (McDougall, 1999), and a high school baseball team that manages, despite inadequate facilities and funding (Johnson, 1999).

Relationships between university faculty and particular schools make it possible for groups of new teachers to work at the same site and anchor collaborative support teams, among what Nieto calls "a community of critical friends" (2000, p.   ). Seven members of the network, including 1 second-year teacher and 6 first-year teachers, were hired at an inner-city middle school in Brooklyn, New York. It was a school suffering from high staff turnover, where only 56 % of the teachers were fully licensed and permanently assigned to the building (New York City Board of Education, 1997). The teachers found that participation in network activities on campus and in informal gatherings at the school helped to sustain them under difficult circumstances that led many new teachers to resign (Schwartz, 1996). According to a white male teaching in this school:

Teaching with the other graduates of the Hofstra program at a middle school in . . . Brooklyn has been an intense experience. The problems that inner city schools face are as dire as advertised. There is an astounding rate of teacher turnover in this school, which means that positions are being filled by inexperienced and often uncertified teachers. The more experienced teachers are overwhelmed. Neglect by supervisors, benevolent or otherwise, is the rule. "Sink or Swim" becomes the only option. The need for support and advice must be filled in one way or another, if first-year teachers are to swim rather than sink. This is where the cadre of enthusiastic and hard-working teachers from the New Teachers' Network comes in.

The same teacher explains:

[T]here is an indescribable comfort that I feel when discussing educational issues with members of our group. There is the assumption of certain opinions, values, goals, and commitments that makes this possible. I know when I ask for classroom management advice, or another way to present material, or some sort of spark that I can use to open a lesson and engage my students, my friends are struggling alongside me. They are not judging me. This helps me combat the negativism and exhaustion that can so quickly and firmly entrench teachers. We all believe that our students can learn. That's the key starting point.

In another example of collaboration, 5 network members teach together in a suburban high school where approximately 35% of the students are members of racial and ethnic minority groups (New York State Education Department, 2000a). Significantly, 4 of the 5

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teachers were hired after student teaching in predominately minority schools where they worked with cooperating teachers who were part of the NTN. The fifth new teacher was a student teacher in this suburban high school. One of these teachers, a woman of European ancestry, explained that "working with the other network members here helped me feel like I was part of something, not just another strange face all on my own. It means there are people I can eat with and talk to and who understand what I am trying to do in my classroom."

The NTN plays a central role in Hofstra University's formal and informal partnerships with schools and districts. A formal relationship was established with a city high school that was reorganized because of poor academic performance and concerns about student safety (New York City Board of Education, 1999). Two members of the faculty serve on the school's advisory board. During the period of this study, dozens of participant/observers visited the school and 11 student teachers chose to work there. Of the 11, 8 became teachers in urban or suburban ethnic minority schools while the other 3 decided to continue their education.

An informal partnership with a suburban middle school with a predominantly black and Hispanic student population was organized by a member of the NTN who became a cooperating teacher at the school (New York State Education Department, 2000b). As a result of this teacher's efforts, the relationship involves her department chair, the school principal, a senior teacher and 4 former student teachers active in the network who also teach in the school. Currently, the middle school hosts dozens of participant-observers and student teachers every semester, and in return, university faculty who are related to the network organize workshops for teachers and campus visits for the middle school students.

The NTN member who initiated the partnership (a woman of mixed European American and Latina heritage) believes her ability to be a mentor and a cooperating teacher were crucial to her personal development as a teacher. She writes:

When I began teaching I was 23 years old and I started having classrooms observers almost from the beginning. After three years, I became a cooperating teacher. Even though I was still relatively new at it, I felt I was a good teacher and ready to take on the responsibility of preparing student teachers. I ended up learning a lot from the experience and I continue to learn new things every time I work with a student teacher. As a beginning teacher I was under a lot of pressure to insure that my students performed well on standardized tests and I had begun to move away from aspects of lessons that I knew were vital for motivating students to learn. Working with student teachers forced me to sit down and examine what I was doing as I helped them with planning and lesson preparation. If I hadn't been working with a student teacher, I don't think I would have become involved in this type of self-reflection and grown as much as a teacher.

One of her former student teachers, (a European American woman) who is now active in the NTN, defines their relationship as:

one of the greatest influences in both my life and career. Without her, I would not be teaching today. She helped me learn to deal with the stress of teaching and that as a white woman I could be a successful teacher working with minority students. Because we are both in the network now, I know I can still turn to her for support whenever I need to. This is the beauty of the network. I don't know what I would do without it.

Although the network focuses on supporting new teachers, preservice teacher education students benefit from the ongoing relationship between the university and its alumni. Network members discuss their experiences with students in education classes, host participant/observers in their schools, and once eligible, serve as cooperating teachers. They provide preservice teacher education students with the opportunity to work in urban and suburban ethnic minority school districts with new teachers who are grappling with the same social and pedagogical issues raised in their education classes. The student teaching pairings are especially important because they provide university supervisors with the opportunity to visit both student teachers and network members.

CONFRONTING REAL ISSUES

Haberman (1995) questions whether schools of education can prepare teachers effectively to work with children in urban and suburban ethnic minority school districts. Cochran-Smith (2000) has eloquently testified to the difficulty of "unlearning racism" and addressing deeply ingrained biases about class, ethnicity and gender within the limits of a teacher education program. One of the NTN's strengths is providing places for teachers who are from different racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds to address their differences while attempting to become racially and culturally responsive educators. NTN discussions, whether at meetings or via the internet, often involve sharp conflicts, but they also provide forums where conflicts can be examined and controversies can be resolved. The following examples illustrate ways that network conversations facilitate reflection and learning in these potentially explosive or silencing, spaces.

In one meeting, a white male teacher told an anecdote about his efforts to build connections with his students, most of whom were African American. He concluded by saying that a particular incident "confirmed my faith in working with my 'dirt bags.'" A woman of Caribbean ancestry who taught in an inner-city junior high school with a primarily African American and Latino/a student body responded by saying that she appreciated his efforts to get close to his students, but was unhappy with the way he referred to some of them as "dirt bags." She explained, "I don't like name calling and using hurtful words. I don't let the kids use these words when they are with me. Teachers should not use language when they talk together that they wouldn't use in front of the kids or their parents."

The statement and the response opened up a heated discussion. A white woman who teaches in a predominately ethnic minority suburban middle school added, "We all know teachers who think like this about our students." An African American woman teaching in a predominately ethnic minority suburban high school believed that the description of the students was being taken out of context. She felt that the teacher's intention in telling the anecdote was to refute stereotypes about inner-city African American students and that the main point was that teachers had "to be interested in students and aware of their needs." A white woman who teaches in an urban high school said that sometimes she is concerned with her own reactions to students. "We all go into class and aren't perfect. It takes time and hard work to develop a positive classroom atmosphere. Sometimes, when I say the kids are wild, I have to catch myself and not say that they acted like animals. It is wrong to say and it is untrue." She has had students challenge her by asking, "Why should we trust you?" or who would curse at her and then add, "You ain't on Long Island anymore." She tries to remember that every day is a new day with new opportunities to reach students. The first step in reaching students is that "teachers have to want to be there."

During post-meeting reflections, the university faculty members were concerned that the white male teacher may have been treated a little too harshly. However, the following Monday, he posted a note on the NTN e-mail network. "I want you to know that our meeting has caused a renewed sense of optimism. School has been very draining for me emotionally and physically. I have few allies and even fewer experienced teachers to lean on here. Life has been far from perfect. I'm looking forward to our next meeting."

Network email conversations have focused on appropriate classroom responses to the events of September 11, 2001 and the use of the word "nigger" or "nigga" as an expression of positive relationship by students (Lee, 2002). In the second case, sharply different positions were taken by black teachers from Caribbean and African American backgrounds. A Caribbean woman argued:

I do not care how much the hip-hop culture defends its tone, use of the word "nigger" in the classroom is not appropriate. It has never been appropriate. If we can exhaust ourselves objecting to student use of the "F" word, then we should do the same for the "N" word. As far as I am concerned, it is worse than profanity. When students understand who

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they are and how much influence they can have on the world, they will stop using this word. When teachers make demands on students, they will respond.

An African American male teacher responded:

I am not offended or threatened when my students use the word "nigga." In my opinion it is a part of Black urban youth culture. Hip-hop has just brought the word and its many linguistic dimensions to the forefront of mainstream culture, but the word "nigga" has been in use amongst urban youth for a long time. Individuals who only know of the negative connotations of the word do not understand why the word is used and accepted among urban youth.

S. Maxwell Hines, a faculty advisor from Hofstra University and an African American woman, joined the discussion and offered participants an historical context for understanding the debate. Hines wrote:

While I have heard the explanation that the term "nigga" is a term of solidarity that acknowledges that Black Pan-African peoples are defined as "Nigger" by others regardless of their circumstances, I reject the use of the word because of its historical meaning. I have not and will not allow students to use this term in my presence because it disrespects me and my ancestors who suffered because of the designation. I understand the argument that in order to usurp the power of the word, Blacks should claim it as their own. Similar arguments were made about "Mammy" and "Stepen Fetchit" in the past. I also reject this position. I am old enough to remember the sixties when Black people referred to each other as "brother" or "sister" as a term of solidarity and empowerment. My friends and I still use these designations and frown upon the use of the word "nigger."

CONCLUSIONS

The Hofstra University New Teachers' Network offers a multifaceted approach to university-based support for new teachers that also enhances the experience of students in its preservice teacher education program. This model is rooted in relationships that develop during preservice teacher education programs and has been successful at recruiting and sustaining new teachers for inner-city urban and suburban minority schools. It is separate from district and school-based teacher development programs connected to hierarchical systems of supervision and bureaucratic constraints. It is maintained through interconnections between university and secondary school classrooms, peer mentoring, regular support meetings, conferences, e-mail contact, and involvement in professional activities. The model recognizes the significance of teacher learning, in the creation of teacher knowledge, the situational and social nature of cognition, and the importance of discourse communities in shaping learning experiences that are powerful enough to transform a teacher's classroom practice. At its core is recognition of the vital role played by long term supportive relationships between teachers and between teachers and mentors in the process of teacher development.

Members of the NTN report that involvement supports their ability to teach in troubled urban and suburban minority schools. It helps them to overcome their inexperience and sense of isolation so they can impact the lives of young people. A statement prepared by one of the mentor teachers, a woman of mixed European American and Latina background, for the network's annual conference captures the magnitude of influence programs like the NTN can have on the life and pedagogical practice of new teachers.

I began attending New Teacher Network meetings during my first year of teaching. I was teaching 6th and 7th grade science in a New York City middle school even though my certification area was social studies. I am currently in my fourth year of teaching and I continue to attend Saturday morning network meetings on a regular basis. My fiancee, who is also a teacher, often wonders what happens at the meetings to keep me attending so religiously. The best way for me to answer this question is to describe how I feel when I leave a network meeting.

We all know how happy we feel on Friday afternoon when that last bell rings and it's time to go home. I'm no different. I often stay late at work, but rarely on Fridays

after a long and tiring week dealing with 8th grade hormones and their endless stores of energy. I struggle to get myself out of bed on Saturday morning, but once I grab my coffee and I'm on my way, my mind starts to roll. I imagine the conversations that will take place and I begin to think of questions or concerns I want to bring up. I know that whatever professional concerns are on my mind, I'll be able to talk about them there. The dynamic of the group is electric. I never feel so much like a professional as I do when I'm there. We're all there to help each other. Sometimes the topics are focused on classroom management, sometimes on how to deal with supervisors or colleagues who do not share a similar teaching philosophy and sometimes on new lesson or project ideas. No matter what, we always share our love for being with the kids. Throughout the meetings, I sit and write down all the new ideas I'm getting, either as suggestions from others or ideas that I thought up as a natural progression from our discussion. When I leave the meeting I am rejuvenated. I rush home and begin planning out all these new activities.

The network keeps the pleasure I feel when I teach fresh, and listening to the concerns and problems of the newer teachers keeps me grounded in reality. I hear that many teachers burn out in their first five years, but I am going just as strong as I was the day I started. I'm sure it's because I have a group of people to talk to, listen to, bounce ideas off of and to give me support.

Problems related to the inadequate preparation of and support for new teachers are generally most pressing in urban and minority schools (Calderone & Buettner, 1999; Haberman, 1995). New York City estimates that one-sixth of its new teachers leave the school system after 1 year and about a third leave within 3 years (Schwartz, 1996). The university professors, new teachers, and mentors who are part of the Hofstra University New Teachers' Network believe this program offers real possibilities for strengthening the teaching profession and improving the quality of education in such schools.

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