The Importance of Beginning Teacher Induction in Your School

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Abstract

This article is review of the literature surrounding the issues of induction with a strong focus on mentoring in specific educational contexts. The article discusses the issues school communities face as they examine the ways induction programs are implemented, decide what type of information to include in such programs, and discern the effect such programs have on teacher retention. This perspective is particularly valuable as more and more induction programs become mandated at the state and national levels.

Introduction

Induction plans for new teachers, which encompass mentoring, usually exist within limited contexts that include all of the mandates and policies guiding local practice (Sweeny & DeBolt, 2000). However, prior to 1984, only eight U.S. states had formal policies regarding beginning teacher induction programs. By the mid-1990's, though, 34 states had such policies ranging from voluntary programs in Idaho to pilot programs in Minnesota to state-mandated programs in Oklahoma (Furtwengler, 1995). In 1998 only 11 states reported having no state sponsored teacher induction program although these states did indicate that such programs were imminent (Sweeny & DeBolt, 2000). The approach of the new millennium saw more states, such as Ohio and Indiana, moving from a period of piloted programs towards structured, state-mandated plans (Ohio Department of Education, 2001; Indiana Professional Standards Board, 2003).

This increased focus on induction programs as an agent of reform in education has resulted in a great deal of research. Most studies, however, are outcome-based, generally used to ensure the financial support needed to continue induction programs in particular areas (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O'Brien, 1995). However, Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, and Niles (1992) note, "mentoring involves highly personal interactions, conducted under different circumstances in different schools" (p. 212). This brings to the foreground the importance of administrators examining the ways individual schools implement induction programs, the types of information included in such programs, and the effect such programs have on teacher retention. This perspective will be particularly valuable as such programs become increasingly mandated.

Wong and Wong (1998) contend that success for new teachers begins with a solid induction program. Without such a program, new teachers may simply perpetuate the status quo by teaching as they were taught, thus threatening a cyclic reproduction of educators who do not consider specific educational contexts. According to Wolfe, Bartell, and DeBolt (2000), quality induction and mentoring programs "recognize the multidimensional environments within which they exist" (p. 47). Because of this, program planners and participants should carefully examine as many of the aspects of the schools where induction programs are implemented as possible. This article offers insight into the ways induction can benefit your school. Through a review of the literature, it also offers a practical approach to use when planning effective induction in individual school contexts.

The Benefits of Successful, Context-Specific Induction

Before considering the benefits of induction programs or questioning their effectiveness, it is first crucial to define exactly the term "induction program." Huling-Austin (1990) defines induction programs as they relate to the field of education as planned programs "intended to provide some systematic and sustained assistance, specifically to beginning teachers for at least one school year" (p. 536). Wong and Wong (1998) add "induction is a structured program that takes place before the first day of school for all newly hired teachers" (p. v). Mere orientation meetings or evaluations, therefore, without planned, formal assistance leading to the fulfillment of professional goals, are not a part of true induction programs (Lawson, 1992). McAlpine and Crago (1995) further define induction as "the year in which the new teacher begins to understand the school culture into which he or she has chosen to enter" (p. 403).

Teacher Induction and Student Achievement

Schools with structured induction programs that successfully inculcate new teachers could see positive consequences for student achievement and attendance as well as overall staff morale (Fetler, 1997b). As Fetler (1997b) points out, schools with higher numbers of experienced teachers, who are therefore more attuned to specific pedagogical cultures, have higher student achievement rates and more collegial atmospheres, leading to positive staff morale. Because of these benefits "it is reasonable to suggest that principals plan their school-based orientation and induction activities with the purpose of retaining new teachers" (Hope, 1999, p. 54).

Induction and Teacher Retention

Existing research has generally explained teacher turnover rates in terms of individual teacher characteristics but organizational features also need to be considered (Ingersoll, 2001). This premise is commonplace in business-related research but is extremely rare in educational research. According to Ingersoll (2001), in cases where teachers leave a particular school on their own accord, organizational features of the school have a strong effect on that decision. For first year teachers, then, the induction year, can be crucial to their decision to continue teaching.

Mandated Induction Programs

As more and more school communities mandate induction, it is becoming increasingly necessary to evaluate the content and implementation of such programs. If administrators fail to look at

induction programs in terms of the ways that they acculturate new teachers, these programs may be developed solely to meet mandated requirements rather than to help first-year teachers become better educators within certain educational contexts. Since it has been shown that such contexts have an influence on psychological processes that impact student achievement (Sackney, 1988), and it has been shown that the best way to improve student achievement is to attend to the preparation of new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fetler, 1997a; Fetler, 1997b), more effort should be devoted to preparing these teachers for their individual schools, not in fulfilling state mandates designed for all teachers regardless of the context within which they may be working. In short, induction must be context specific.

Using Induction to Ensure Success for Beginning Teachers

Although there is no agreed upon formula schools can use to ensure the success of their first year teachers, there are several common practices schools can use that have proven effective. The most common of these is a solid induction program with a focus on mentoring.

According to *A Guide to Developing Teacher Induction Programs* (2000), a handbook developed by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (RNT), teacher induction is the "process of socialization to the teaching profession, adjustment to the procedures and mores of the school site and school system, and development of effective instructional and classroom management skills" (p. 2). Induction programs, therefore, should not only provide assistance with technical educational issues, they should also provide the new teacher with opportunities to begin to understand the school's culture and the effect of that culture on the school's climate. Likewise, such programs should also introduce new educators to the culture of the profession of teaching. Induction programs can take on many forms such as short orientation sessions, mentoring programs, and staff development courses (RNT, 2000) as well as more informal processes.

There is a much smaller, though no less important, body of literature exploring the informal mentoring process first year teachers undergo (Tillman, 2000; Klug & Salzman, 1991). This process can include, but is not limited to, informal discussions with other teachers and administrators, learning procedures from school secretaries and custodians, and learning from trial and error. When considering the process of enculturation, it is essential to consider the informal process since a great deal of what is learned comes from immersion in the school setting. Once immersed, most of a new teacher's interactions with others will be on the informal level. This can become a problem, however, since formal, state mandated programs do not allow for the individual differences of a wide range of schools.

In general, most teacher induction programs seek to accomplish many goals for teachers that will, in turn, have positive consequences for students. These goals include slowing teacher attrition, screening out incompetent teachers, improving student achievement, breaking down the isolation inherent in the profession, and eliminating the "brain drain" of urban teachers to the suburbs (RNT, 2000). How these programs are implemented varies greatly from school to school. One major factor affecting these differences is the set of guidelines designed on the state level that affects the implementation of these programs locally. Another factor encompasses the complexity of beginning teacher needs due to the individuality of first year educators.

The Needs of First Year Teachers

That the annual attrition rate for beginning teachers is approximately twice that of experienced teachers (Odell & Ferraro, 1992) suggests that there are specific needs first year teachers have that must be addressed. First year teachers have a very distinct set of needs related to induction programs due to the specific set of characteristics that define them as new teachers. While this will differ somewhat from teacher to teacher and school to school, it is possible to compile a list of these needs that make structured and sustained induction programs a necessity for success. This list includes (1) getting students to cooperate, (2) improving instructional techniques, (3) how to talk to parents and legal guardians, (4) understanding the working environment (Wildman, et al., 1992; Odell & Ferraro, 1992), and (5) dealing with academic or extra-curricular assignments (Huling-Austin, 1992). Other barriers to success first year teachers face include (1) large class sizes, (2) unfamiliarity with curriculum, (3) language barriers, (4) low salaries/inadequate compensation, and (5) lack of respect as a teacher (RNT, 2000).

It has been found that new teachers have emotional needs that must be met during their first year of teaching. In a study by Odell and Ferraro (1992), new teachers cited this emotional confirmation as the most valuable support they received during their induction year. Teachers also have needs based on the fact that teaching is an isolated profession (Graham, 1997). Beginning teachers, however, need frequent opportunities to share and solve problems with experienced teachers as well as other first-year teachers. It has been shown that induction programs need to be structured to allow for these types of interactions since cohort groups have been shown to reduce isolation among novice teachers and foster professional growth (Huling-Austin, 1992). Another problem that stems directly from isolation is that mentor teachers often have little experience communicating with other teachers about their practice because they spend the majority of their time working with students in their own classrooms, not with other teachers (Gratch, 1998). In this situation, the isolation of a mentor teacher can work against a new teacher because that mentor has little experience sharing with peers.

Teachers' needs also depend on how similar the new school culture is to their own experiences as a student. As McAlpine and Crago (1995) state "if the community culture is similar to their own experiences, then they [new teachers] can depend with more certitude on the interpretation of cues" (p. 404). Likewise, Weiner (2000) shows that new teachers are most comfortable teaching students similar to themselves in school settings like the schools they attended. Therefore, the more the culture the teacher is entering differs from her or his own experiences, the more needs that teacher will have. Many of these needs, however, can be addressed through quality mentoring.

Effective Mentoring Techniques

Mentoring can be viewed as "a professional practice that occurs in the context of teaching whenever an experienced teacher supports, challenges, and guides novice teachers in the teaching practice" (Odell & Hulling, 2000, p. xii). Keeping this definition in mind, many researchers have addressed which techniques for mentoring are most effective (Wildman, et al., 1992; Abell, et al., 1995; Huling-Austin, 1992; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992; RNT, 2000). Most researchers agree, however, that good mentoring starts, first and foremost, with a

good mentor.

Odell and Huling (2000) define a mentor as an experienced teacher who, as part of his or her professional assignment, mentors pre-service or beginning teachers as they learn to teach. Characteristics of a good mentor include (1) willingness to be a mentor, (2) sensitivity to the needs of new teachers, (3) being helpful but not authoritarian, (4) being diplomatic, (5) ability to anticipate problems, (6) encouraging, (7) keeping beginner's problems confidential, (8) enthusiasm about teaching, (9) being a good role model at all times, (10) having an understanding of school district policy, needs, and priorities, (11) skill in classroom observations, (12) experience working with adult learners, and (13) ability to provide timely feedback to keep new teacher apprised of successes (Wildman, et al., 1992; Abell, et al., 1995; Huling-Austin, 1992; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992; RNT, 2000).

Wildman et al. (1992) cite the prime trait of mentors who sustained their relationships with new teachers as the willingness of the experienced teacher to be a mentor. Forced mentor-novice relationships more than likely will amount to little more than contrived collegiality (Lawson, 1992). Unfortunately, in schools with large numbers of new teachers this is a very real threat.

Assuming a mentor meets all of the expectations previously described, there are several techniques that have proven to be effective when dealing with new teachers. First is the idea of reflection (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Wildman, et al, 1992; Stanulis, 1995; Watkins & Whalley, 1995). Mentors should encourage reflection in new teachers in order to draw them into a meaningful deliberation of the various choices they might consider in reaching their own conclusions or solutions to problems, questions, and dilemmas. Regular meetings between a mentor and a beginning teacher can easily accommodate such reflection as can the encouragement of maintaining a teaching journal.

Another effective technique is the directive and supporting action that mentors provide to new teachers. This concerns mentors using their expertise to help beginners detect problem areas and to remind them of school policies and procedures. Part of this technique includes the provision of specific, intact products or procedures for the new teacher to use (Wildman, et al., 1992; Abell, et al. 1995). In order to take full advantage of this technique, mentors must be given release time to observe beginning teaches and conference with them.

One of the most effective mentoring techniques includes the direct assistance mentors give new teachers; in other words, the hand-in-hand work done with the new teacher in order to ensure success in their new profession (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Wildman, et al., 1992). This also implies good communication skills between mentors and new teachers. Schools can actually anticipate communication problems and plan accordingly (Watkins & Whalley, 1995) by placing beginning teachers and their mentors as close as possible in the school building. Other administrative requirements that must be in place in order to maximize the effectiveness of a mentor/teacher relationship include flexible meeting times that allow for the most effective use of time, (Abell, et al., 1995) and the matching of content areas of the mentors and the new teachers with whom they work (Huling-Austin, 1992).

The most effective mentors also supply emotional support to new teachers about personal as well as professional matters (Abell, et al., 1995). This is not surprising since it was previously noted that one of the greatest needs new teachers have is the need to be supported on an emotional level. This emotional support also helps to firmly establish the bond of trust that must exist between a mentor and a new teacher if this dyad is to succeed.

Effective mentoring should also address individualized needs based on race and gender that are inherent in any kind of teaching process (Graham, 1997). As Lawson (1992) points out, too often programs designed to help first year teachers neglect the notion that induction is not done to a person, but rather experienced by the person within a particular context. Placing induction programs within certain contexts is just one way to maximize their effectiveness. The following section discusses other characteristics of effective induction programs.

Effective Induction Programs

The most effective teacher induction programs have several key components in common. One of the most important of these is that induction is viewed as a multiyear, developmental process, not a short-term program (RNT, 2000). Other key components include administrators understanding the needs of new teachers, the provision of well-trained mentors, evaluations that are linked to district and state standards, and the provision of the necessary technology to facilitate communication among inductees, mentors, and university faculty (RNT, 2000).

Effective induction programs also allow for the fact that teachers' needs change over the course of time. The National Education Association (NEA, 1999) points out that there are three stages to new teacher induction. Stage one should focus on practical skills and information such as how to order supplies, make copies, find resources, etc. During stage two, mentors and their protégés should concentrate more on teaching itself as well as classroom management skills. Stage three should see a shift towards a more complete understanding of instructional strategies as well as ongoing professional development.

Effective induction programs are shaped by the specific needs of the student population, these students' families, and the community at large. This becomes even more important if new teachers are not familiar with the culture or the traditions of the community (NEA, 1999).

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) summarizes the qualities of mentoring and induction programs that they value using eight characteristics. Such programs (1) focus on helping novices learn to teach in accordance with professional standards, (2) are responsive to the evolving needs of individual novices and their students, (3) view becoming a good teacher as a developmental process, (4) view mentoring as a professional practice that must be learned and developed over time, (5) include careful selection, preparation, and on-going development for new mentors, (6) involve experienced teachers as mentors and include mentors in program design and evaluation, (7) are collaboratively planned, implemented, and evaluated by key stakeholders, and (8) contribute to improving school and district cultures for teaching, learning, and learning to teach (Odell, Huling, & Sweeny, 2000).

Not all research concerning teacher induction programs is positive, however. The following section explores potential negative implications regarding induction programs and the weaknesses that are inherent in such programs.

Induction Program Weaknesses

Research shows that there are some problems with induction programs in general and state-mandated induction programs more specifically (Abell, et al., 1995; Wildman, et al., 1992; Ruff & Shoho, 2001). This section addresses some of the problems that are inherent in any induction program and some that may arise because of the implementation of a state-mandated program.

Although a great deal of research supports mentoring programs, there are some problems that exist because of the nature of state-mandated induction programs. The main problem is that since each school has its own unique culture, a one-size-fits-all program will not work for all schools (Lawson, 1992). The majority of the research that has been done points to the individualized nature of teaching and teacher development so researchers have been quick to point out the irony that states are depending more and more on standardized forms of testing instead of recognizing that the key to better teacher development lies in true understandings of individualized school cultures (Weiner, 2000).

Dittmer (1990) points out, "schools must be organized around values, not flow charts, curricula, authority hierarchies, or externally imposed mandates" (p. 84). These values are naturally going to be different depending on the culture and climate of the school. Lawson (1992) points out, though, that most induction programs focus so much on the functional boundaries marked by technical responsibilities and work responsibilities that they exclude boundaries that are more dependent on group acceptance.

Time to implement these programs is also a major factor and simply buying time for teachers is not a solution (Wildman, et al., 1992). Most induction programs last only one year but educators have noted that even though "the orientation phase of the process may conclude after the first year, induction should continue in order to develop teachers' repertoires of skills and to inculcate teaching as a career" (Hope, 1999, p. 54).

Another problem with formal induction programs is that they usually do not address the large body of knowledge that new teachers learn tacitly. Both educational and anthropological experts agree that one of the main ways a person learns a new culture, in this case that of the school, is through tacit learning (White, 1989; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1999; Rogoff, 1995; Chambers & Roper, 2000). Not acknowledging this type of learning can lead to unenlightened induction programs that pull new teachers in opposite directions. As Brown and Duguid (2000) point out, this can "isolate people from the sorts of ongoing practice of work itself" (p. 129) and result in focusing too much on discrete pieces of information.

Lawson (1992) points out several additional reasons that make the implementation of induction programs problematic. These include: (1) most programs try to do too much, (2) some programs can unintentionally foster competition among teachers, (3) programs are designed in ways that often neglect teachers' real needs, and (4) they fail to accommodate the personal-developmental needs of teachers. Lawson suggests that induction programs be reconceived in order to meet the

true needs of beginning teachers. As he points out, short-term induction programs work on the assumption that they can anticipate the needs of new teachers which is, of course, only possible up to a certain point. Abell, et al., (1995) further state that "the detailed guides for mentors and training sessions that many states and school districts require may not influence participants as much as the intrinsic value participants place on the mentoring relationship" (p. 185). This leads to the conclusion that individual teachers and individual school climates may be more influential than state mandates when it comes to designing an induction program that will actually be beneficial to those working in a particular school.

There is also the problem of unsuccessful new teacher/mentor dyads. Research has shown that if new teachers have no professional respect for their mentors, the relationship is perceived as less useful than if they did have this respect (Abell, et al., 1995). There is also research that shows that induction can lead to teacher burnout. In this sense, the strength of the school culture, when combined with the new teacher's desire to become an expert teacher as quickly as possible, can result in "activities which go far beyond a typical teacher's normal role during the school day" (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 1999, p. 284). In other words, in their attempt to become an expert teacher, some novices believe they must finish this process within the first year of induction. This belief can drive new teachers to over-achieve, which can result in teacher burnout. The fact that formal induction programs usually only last for one year enables this thinking even further.

Funding is yet another area that makes induction programs problematic. In 1996, state funding for such programs ranged from $150,000 in Virginia to $80.2 million in California (RNT, 2000). This huge disparity in funding naturally results in a major gap in quality in teacher induction from state to state. Additionally, some states that require induction programs do not provide any type of funding to cover the expense (Furtwengler, 1995; Sweeny & DeBolt, 2000).

According to the National Center for Research on Teaching and Learning (NCRTL) at Michigan State University (1992), there is not much evidence that mentoring programs actually improve new teachers' classroom performance. While they may increase the likelihood that teachers will stay in the profession, mentoring itself does not create more skillful teachers. Other research (Johnson, Ratsoy, Holdaway, & Friesen, 1993), however, has shown that mentoring does indeed have an impact on teachers' skills. The NCRTL, though, suggests that simply because a mentor is a good teacher of children, does not make that person a good teacher of adult learners so it is difficult to predict how successful that person may be in helping a new teacher.

In addition to the complexities of the mentoring process, new teacher induction is further complicated by the beliefs new teachers bring with them to the classroom as they make the transition from student to teacher in a new cultural context. Weiner (2000) asserts that "countless articles and papers detailed the difficulty of changing teachers' attitudes and practices as they worked with students who were not white, middle class, and monolingual, as most teacher candidates are" (p. 388). Their beliefs, however, are key in deciding what types of issues need to be addressed in induction programs. The majority of the research concerning the beliefs of new teachers suggests that no matter what the beliefs are, substantially changing them is difficult at best, impossible at worst (Kagan, 1992; Bramald, Hardman, & Leat, 1995). Knowles (1992) concludes that past experiences of new teachers have a great impact on the ways these educators regard teaching. Another problematic area for new teachers concerns the conflicts they encounter

regarding proper teacher behavior.

When entering their first teaching experiences, new teachers are often unsure of how they should act. This problem is further compounded if the school culture they enter as a teacher is different from their previous school culture when they filled the role of student. Their beliefs are muddled by memories of their own schooling, what they think society expects, and their formal knowledge from teacher preparation courses (White, 1989). These beliefs can complicate the beginning teacher's transition from the role of student to the role of teacher because many new teachers are not striving to be professionals; rather they simply want to "act like teachers and be part of the school culture" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1999, p. 281). Bramald, Hardman, and Leat (1995) point out that "there is great emotional pressure to look the part of the teacher, to be able to manage classrooms, to get through the syllabus. . .and to have a busy classroom atmosphere" (p. 28). These beliefs are strongly influenced by the expectations of what a teacher should or should not be. How such beliefs are created in new school situations is explained in Hodkinson and Hodkinson (1999) as enculturation. This process of internalizing beliefs and values held by the staff of a particular school is based on two premises: tacit learning and the new teacher's need to fit into a particular role.

Induction in Culturally Specific Contexts

The task of effective induction is not one that simply rests on the shoulders of a beginning teacher's mentor. All school community members (including teachers, administrators, staff members, students, parents, etc.) have a profound effect on beginning teachers and the way in which such teachers perceive their new surroundings. This process is complicated for beginning teachers since they are learning two things at once: the culture of the school in which they have found their first teaching position and the culture of the new profession they have entered. For effective induction, mentors need not only to possess the personal dispositions detailed in this article, but they must also understand that they are, in part, responsible for this cultural transmission. This type of cultural transmission, however, can be quite complex. Therefore, school administrators must recognize that such processes take time and considerable effort; beginning teachers will need sustained support.

School communities also need to work towards creating induction plans that not only value new teachers, but also recognize their unique differences and the unique cultural settings in which they are working. Both formal and informal enculturation processes of the school need to be considered and, when possible, facilitated. Only then can an induction plan truly begin to initiate a teacher in a way that will not only affect that person's decision to stay in the classroom but also impact their students' achievement.

As induction becomes increasingly mandated, there is a greater need to reflect on the quality of such programs. The one-size fits all models of the past are no longer useful and cannot begin to address the wide array of cultural contexts in which beginning teachers will find themselves. Current programs must take into account these differences and be based on the premise that induction does far more than simply orient someone to a building. Induction should be the vital link between the transmission of a specific educational culture and the success of the beginning teacher in that culture.

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