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Effective Practices and Resources for Support of Beginning Teachers

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[Effective Practices and Resources for Support of Beginning Teachers](#)

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Abstract

School district-level, site-based support and effective mentoring and induction programs for new teachers can help new teachers' self efficacy, dispositions and acquisition of knowledge and skills. In addition, sustained support may lower attrition rates, increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom, and save school districts money. School districts must intensify efforts to work with school administrators to provide effective support, guidance and orientation programs during the initial years of teaching. While induction programs vary considerably from state to state and across school districts, they are typically intended to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom and impact teacher attrition rates.

Key words: new teachers, teacher induction, urban high school

There has been growing concern about the decreasing number of teachers in public education (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guin, 2003). Yet there are specific circumstances that add to the teacher shortages such as lack of administrative support, classroom management issues, poor working conditions, low pay, the aging teacher population and early retirements (Murphy et al., 2003). The shortage of science and mathematics teachers, forces schools to hire large numbers of under qualified teachers each year. Out-of-field teachers are increasingly appointed to teach science and mathematics despite the fact that they confess that they are not prepared to teach these content areas. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, (2002), the most significant results of this situation, is the detrimental effect on student achievement as the classroom teacher is a principal aspect of student achievement (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001).

The school culture is frequently linked to the isolation that is often present in schools. Brock and Grady (2001) assert that when new teachers teach in a school culture where the faculty share common goals and work collaboratively, they are more inclined to have a positive teaching experience. On the other hand, novice teachers who start their teaching careers in an unstructured environment are more likely to experience a less positive climate and even isolation.

The lack of social support that stems from isolation or a non-supportive school atmosphere determines the experiences of a beginning teacher. This in turn may lead to the teacher displaying pessimistic attitudes towards the students and thus have a negative effect on the teacher's instructional program. According to Gordon & Maxey, (2000) there are teachers who acquire "a survival mentality, a set of restricted teaching methods, and a resistance to curricular and instructional change that may last throughout their teaching careers" (p. 8).

The quality of the mentoring and induction program that beginning teachers receive has a direct effect on the development and performance of the novice teacher (Athanasas et al, 2008). Moir et al (1999) suggests that the quality of the classroom teacher is the most important indicator of student learning. They believe that an induction program that focuses on beginning teacher support and classroom

practice while advocating the very ideals that encouraged the teacher into the profession offers hope for today's schools. For Fullan (1993), novice teachers enter the profession with commitment, passion and an idealistic view of teaching, determined to make a difference in the lives of their students. Yet, often they face challenging teaching assignments, inadequate working conditions, lack of resources, and isolation. Shocked by the realities of teaching, they encounter a system that fails to value its beginning teachers as one of their most precious resources. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2007) school districts must make a valuable investment in the quality of beginning teachers at the outset of their teaching career. This support needs to be sustained throughout the novice teachers' professional career.

The leadership within the school as well as the perceived level of trust within the school environment are indicative of the beginning teacher's ability and eagerness to welcome feedback and embrace constructive criticism. Indeed in some cases where outside researchers and other district level administrators become part of informal observations, there is an increased level of support for beginning teachers. As Hargreaves and Fullan (1999, p. 18) point out:

After decades of assuming that teachers taught alone, learned to sink or swim by themselves and got better over time only through their own individual trial and error, there is increasing commitment to the idea and the evidence that all teachers are more effective when they can learn from and are supported by a strong community of colleagues.

There are numerous ways in which new teachers are able to learn from their colleagues, such as team teaching, sharing information, peer-coaching, planning sessions, and informal chats in the hallway and over coffee or lunch. It is evident that beginning teachers need to feel confident enough to take risks, ask for help, stretch their limits, and share their concerns.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1999, p. 21), are keen observers of the human condition and their work bears careful reading:

Teaching is an emotional practice. It arouses colors and feelings in teachers and students. Teaching not only involves instructing students, but also caring for them, forming bonds and relationships with them. With the children of many of today's postmodern families – fractured, poor, single-parented-this burden of caring is becoming even greater. Teaching is not just about mastering a set of skills. It is a job where teachers repeatedly put their selves on the line. Times of rapid change, whether chosen or imposed, can create even greater anxiety and insecurity among many teachers as the challenge of mastering new strategies calls their competence and confidence into question...[I]t is easy to lose sight of teaching's emotional dimension, of the enthusiasm, passion, care, wisdom, inspiration, and dedication that make many teachers great.

Induction and Support for Beginning Teachers

In an attempt to recognize the novice teacher as a beginner, there must be authentic and meaningful support in place that promotes the teachers' growth and development. Scherer (1999) suggests that "beginning-teacher induction has broad-based support" (p. 3). She concurs that teacher shortages and the high attrition rates during the initial years of teaching prove attractive for induction programs that

sustain teacher retention. According to Berry (2004), the federal government suggests strategies such as teacher induction and professional development as an approach towards guaranteeing that highly-qualified teachers meet the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (2001) in ensuring that students make adequate yearly progress.

For Bartell (2005) induction is “a part of the career-long teacher-development continuum” that helps novice teachers become effective and assists in the retention of teachers (p. 43). Wong (2002) advocates the idea that if new teacher induction programs focus on skill development, support, and retention, lifelong learning may be sustained. Villani (2002) suggests that induction is a planned well-organized program that provides adequate resources, time, and support. Feiman-Nemser & Featherstone (1992) concede that retention rates are indicative of the support that beginning teachers receive; however, they argue that the paramount objective of new teacher induction is the effective development of professionals who are able to help students learn.

Mentoring

The term “mentor” comes from the literary text *Odyssey* in which a character Mentor was selected to educate and help Telemachus while his father was fighting in the Trojan War. The word has now evolved and according to Villani (2002) is defined as “a wise and trusted friend” (p. 7). Similarly the role of the mentor has evolved to comprise sponsor, protector, teacher, guide, and supporter. Bey (1995) believes that mentoring is a collaborative partnership where teachers share and develop interdependent interests. He contends that mentors act as role models that encourage, counsel and support new teachers. In the early 1980s, teacher mentoring programs developed in an attempt to reduce the rate of teacher attrition among beginning teachers. The intention was to offer new teachers an effective transition into the world of teaching, instruct mentors in the most effective methods of support of novice teachers, and develop the teaching profession (Wang & Odell, 2002). Coppola et al. (2004) insist that simply assigning mentors to work with novice teachers does not provide beginning teachers with the knowledge, skills and support they will need to be successful in the classroom. They emphasize that a multi-year induction program that offers a collegial-mentoring component and an effective professional development program that targets specific needs is necessary.

For Boreen & Niday (2003), mentoring is more than an experienced teacher supporting a novice teacher. They contend that mentoring offers a “vast array of life and professional learning experiences that enhance their ability to interact with their colleagues in a collegial manner” (p. 15). Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon (1995) suggest that mentoring offers a way for experienced teachers to provide individualized, ongoing professional support. Feiman-Nemser, Schwill, Carver, & Yusko (1999) note that although mentoring is the most common form of support for beginning teachers, for it to be effective requires thoughtful selection, training and support of the mentor. Bartell (2005) argues that “the support and mentoring that occur in a well-designed induction program are not a substitute for strong academic preparation” (p. 15). Mentoring has been identified as a method that may be used for retaining beginning teachers and an indicator of their effectiveness in the classroom (Claycomb, 2000). Wang & Odell (2002) identified three major areas that are crucial in the beginning teacher mentoring process: (a) humanistic (assisting teachers on a personal level immerse themselves into the teaching profession); (b) apprentice (assisting beginning teachers transition into the culture of the school and help with the progress of teachers in specific contexts); and (c) critical constructivist (reconstructing teaching, asking questions and questioning current teaching practices).

Teacher Mentoring in the Urban School

Guyton & Hildago (1995) suggest that the mentoring process of beginning teachers can be affected by the culture and context of the school. They also contend that the culture of urban schools differs somewhat to that of suburban schools. Therefore, the manner in which novice teachers conduct themselves in terms of their disposition, beliefs, and acquisition of knowledge is likely to be heavily

influenced by factors that are distinctive to the urban school setting.

According to Tillman (2005), typically urban school teachers teach children of color who may not be motivated, resources may not be readily available, there may be lack of parental support, and teacher instruction may not follow the traditional methods. As a consequence mentors of teachers in an urban setting may have a very different role to play when compared to the mentors serving teachers in a primarily middle-class setting. What Claycomb (2000) suggests is that mentors within the urban context may have to help novice teachers in acknowledging and dealing with the challenges posed by teaching students from poverty who frequently require that their teachers advocate for them socially, academically and emotionally. Tillman (2005) also concurs that “teacher mentors in urban schools may also be called upon to help new teachers reflect on and understand the unique histories and experiences and the varied learning styles and needs of students from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups” (p. 612).

Administrative Support

Tillman (2005) acknowledges the role of the teacher mentor but also indicates that the role of the school administration in terms of the mentoring process requires careful examination. She argues that the role of the school administration in facilitating the mentoring and induction process of beginning teachers is not well documented. While Ganser (2001) believes that the role of the administration in the mentoring process of novice teachers should be a passive one and that the teacher mentor should play the predominant role, researchers such as Brock & Hope (1999) have argued that the school administration should also be proactive in the mentoring process.

Brock (1999) explains that administrators need to nurture and help their teachers develop and assist with the transition from teacher education programs into the culture of the school. Hope (1999) points out that regular contact is needed from administrators in order to inform novice teachers of expectations and successfully orient them into the culture of the school. Hope (1999) identifies six elements of professional development that should emerge from contact between the new teacher and the school administration: (a) intervention to decrease the isolation of teachers, (b) the facilitation of collaborative relationships and mentoring, (c) accessibility, (d) making professional development available, (e) ensuring that the teaching assignment is aligned in order to ensure success, and (f) describing the process of evaluation.

Wang & Odell's (2002) criticism of the deficiencies of teacher education programs indicates the need for the school administration to be proactive in terms of supporting beginning teachers. Tillman (2005) highlights the importance of administrators assisting novice teachers in understanding the culture of the school and becoming reflective practitioners. She points out that it is equally important that teachers are helped to transition and relate what they have learned in their teacher education programs into the context of the school in which they are teaching. Tillman (2005) also analyses the intentional outcomes of the mentoring process suggesting that by enhancing the novice teacher's personal and professional development beginning teachers may be able to shift their skills and knowledge to their current school setting.

Wojnowski et al. (2003) assert that there are distinct consequences that emerge as a result of effective mentoring and induction. Teacher quality improves and there is a noticeable development of both the mentee and mentor's teacher skills that can lead to increased retention rates. Bartell (2005) reports that if induction activities challenge teachers to critically examine their own practice and reflect on student learning, this in turn helps students by helping their teachers. Similarly Robinson (1998) suggests that successful induction programs are more likely to produce effective teachers who in turn benefit student learning by encouraging them to take risks.

Research on induction, coaching, mentoring and other types of support appears to focus on how universities, school systems, teaching federations, site based administrators and veteran teachers can

offer support to beginning teachers. Although their methods of evaluation and analysis may differ somewhat, all agree that it is difficult to overestimate the importance of mentoring, induction, and support for beginning teachers, and experienced faculty. What is evident is that school districts must invest in induction programs and support systems if beginning teachers are to prove successful. Horn, Sterling & Subhan (2002) suggest that an effective induction program is provided through orientation, mentoring, professional development, and collaboration. Both the extent and quality of induction programs vary extensively between school districts and from state to state. While individual school districts may have particular circumstances and needs, effective induction, support and mentoring programs for beginning teachers needs to be a priority. Nevertheless, due to the lack of finances, politics, commitment and other resources, some induction programs prove to be ineffective and lacking in specific areas (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

The needs of beginning teachers are well articulated by Veenman (1984, pp. 153-156), who categorized the ten most crucial issues that new teachers face: classroom discipline, student motivation, dealing with individual differences among students, assessment of student work, interaction with parents, organizing work, obtaining sufficient materials for adequate instruction, dealing with students' personal problems, heavy course loads with inadequate preparation time, and collegial collaboration. However, as beginning teachers gain more classroom experience and develop relationships with parents and students these pertinent needs become increasingly less stressful for the novice teacher.

Gordon and Maxey (2000) collated a set of needs for beginning teachers and suggest that if these needs are met it is likely that the novice teacher will progress and develop into a successful teacher:

- adjusting to the teaching environment and role
- planning, organizing, and managing instruction as well as other professional responsibilities
- dealing with individual students' needs, interest, abilities, and problems
- managing the classroom
- obtaining instructional resources and materials
- using effective teaching methods
- communicating with colleagues, including administrators, supervisors, and other teachers
- communicating with parents
- motivating students
- receiving emotional support
- assessing students and evaluating student progress. (p. 6).

Although Gordon & Maxey identify some of the most prevailing issues for the novice teacher here, this list is by no means exhaustive in terms of the needs of beginning teachers.

Characteristics of Beginning Teachers

Researchers have suggested that people enter the teaching profession because they take pleasure from interacting with young people. A further reason certain people choose to become teachers is that they care about the welfare and education of students and have a strong desire to help them achieve academically (Gold & Roth 1993; & Lortie, 1975).

Bartell's (2005) work bears careful reading as she points out new teacher motivations and career

choices:

Novice teachers today enter the profession with differing levels of preparation, experience, and expertise. Like the students they will serve, they come with a variety of expectations, hopes, dreams, and understandings. Some will go through a traditional teacher preparation program and will enter the job market immediately after graduation. Others will find their initial career choice unsatisfying and look for more satisfaction in teaching. (p. 9).

According to Wadsworth (2001), beginning teachers feel that they are talented individuals who have responded to some type of calling. Further, they perceive themselves as hardworking and devoted to the teaching profession. It is their belief that teaching is a profession known for requiring high levels of energy, effort and dedication.

Clement, Enz, and Pawlas (2000) state that novice teachers are passionate about their work, idealistic, creative, energetic, and have a desire to develop professionally. Hargreaves and Fullan (1999) suggest that it is the younger members of the profession who usually bring more energy into the classroom. They believe that these young teachers generally have less family responsibilities, are typically more idealistic and are inclined to be more dedicated to the profession. Yet Veenman (1984) believes that beginning teachers experience 'reality shock' as a state of mind when the realization of the demands of teaching becomes real to them. According to Villani (2002), teacher education students predicted that they expected to encounter fewer difficulties than the 'average first-year teacher' on numerous tasks. Based on these findings, Weinstein (1988) suggests that beginning teachers enter the teaching profession with the belief that teaching is not particularly difficult. Thus, Villani (2002) argues that it is necessary for mentors to help with the inevitable "reality shock" (p. 4).

Psychological Stages of a First-Year Teacher

Villani (2002) believes that the survival needs of novice teachers are highest at both the beginning and end of the school year and suggests that the new teachers' curriculum and instructional needs are less crucial during these times. In contrast, she highlights the fact that mid-year (a time when the survival needs of new teachers are at their lowest); the instructional and curriculum needs are at their highest. Villani (2002) compares this with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and suggests that one cannot take care of high order needs until one's survival needs are met. She concurs that novice teachers are unable to consider issues of instruction and curriculum until they have become familiar with the protocol of the school and have established a rapport with their students, which essentially satisfies and contributes to their academic learning.

Moir (1999) identifies several developmental stages that novice teachers' experience. Her research indicates how initially beginning teachers go through an *anticipation phase* with an idealistic view of teaching. However, they rapidly become overwhelmed and experience a *survival phase* with a sense of struggling to keep up. Moir (1999) points out that during this second phase new teachers are inclined to focus on the day-to-day aspects of teaching. It is frequently this phase that leads to the next phase that of *disillusionment*. This is where novice teachers start to doubt their levels of commitment and also their ability to teach. Moir (1999) suggests that this phase may vary in terms of both duration and intensity. Typically following the winter break, teachers are well rested and somewhat more relaxed and often enter a phase of *rejuvenation*. It is at this time that the beginning teacher gains confidence and learns to develop new coping strategies. Moir (1999) believes that it is towards the end of the school year that new teachers begin to reflect on the earlier part of the school year and thus they enter a period of *reflection*. It is during this phase that the new teacher starts to contemplate what they will do differently during their second year of teaching. Moir (1999) emphasizes that "recognizing the stages

that new teachers go through gives us a framework within which we can begin to design support programs to make the first year of teaching a more productive experience for our new colleagues” (p. 23).

Traditionally Prepared Teachers and Alternative Licensure into the Teaching Profession

Bartell (2005) stresses that those who plan teacher induction have some understanding of the skills and knowledge that new teachers bring to the profession. She points out that new teachers are increasingly entering the profession through alternative routes to certification; yet it is the ‘early deciders’ who enter through the traditional four or five year college education program. Typically these teachers study the subject content pedagogy of the subject they wish to teach. Darling-Hammond et al, (1999) believe that the best traditional teacher preparation programs also offer the following components:

- *Knowledge about learners and learning*, including knowledge about human growth and development, motivation and behavior, learning theory, learning differences, and cognitive psychology;
- *Knowledge about curriculum and teaching*, including general and content-specific pedagogical knowledge, curriculum theory, assessment and evaluation, and counseling, as well as knowledge of scientific inquiry, epistemology, communication, and language as they relate to pedagogy;
- *Knowledge about contexts and foundations of education*, including knowledge about schools and society, cultures, educational history and philosophy, principles from sociology and anthropology, legal responsibilities of teachers and ethics. (p. 35-38).

Bartell (2005) explains that most traditional programs also incorporate field experiences into the program. She accepts that teaching programs may vary but contends that generally teachers bring what they have learned in these programs to their first teaching position. In addition she states that “these novices are hardly finished learners about the profession they have chosen to enter... Induction programs are intended not to reteach, but to build upon and extend that initial preparation experience” (p. 7). However, Bartell asserts that the increasing number of people entering the profession without this basic classroom preparation is somewhat problematic. She identifies that alternative programs vary considerably from state to state ranging between programs that are offered evenings, weekends and throughout the summer to programs where certification can be achieved through assessment of knowledge and skills and demonstrated experience. Typically, teachers who opt to take the alternative certification route take coursework classes at the same time that they are serving as teachers.

Bartell (2005) stresses the important point that “all of these teachers have different learning needs depending on the background, preparation, and experience that they bring to the job” (p. 8). She cites examples of new teachers moving from one state to another, from an urban district to a rural district from one grade level to another and contends that in these circumstances the new teacher must learn to assimilate to his/her new surroundings. Similarly she alludes to the fact that a teacher who returns to the profession after a career break also has to gain knowledge of the current curriculum and assessment standards. Bartell (2005) suggests that the most successful induction and mentoring programs will address all of these possible differences and needs of beginning teachers in order to ensure success with their students:

An effective plan for support of all these newteachers will recognize and build on the knowledge and experience the beginning teacher brings to the classroom, assist teachers in gaining what is weak or lacking, and extend learning so that the teacher moves to higher levels of accomplished teaching (p. 9).

Summary

The existing research provides useful insights into contemporary methods of beginning teacher support, mentoring and induction programs. Yet what is not evident is how effective the mentoring and induction program is for lateral entry teachers. This does not suggest that the initial experiences of beginning teachers are entirely different from those of their colleagues that teach in an established school with experienced administrators. Although lateral entry teachers may lack pre-service training in the field of education, once employed within the school district they experience many of the same conditions as their counterparts. Future research must address the areas of leadership, district level support and school-based support as it appears that there are variations in terms of levels of support received by beginning teachers from state to state, and across and within school districts. Little research has been conducted on whether the levels of support that are documented and commonly accepted within school districts are in fact provided for beginning teachers. Thus, additional research and evaluation specific to current school district induction programs may consider using a follow up method to evaluate how effective the mentoring and induction program really is across an entire school district.

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