

Quality Induction: An Investment in Teachers

By Ellen Moir & Janet Gless

In the next 10 years, a tidal wave of new teachers will enter classrooms across America. The United States Department of Education projects the nation will need more than two million new teachers by 2010. Aside from rising enrollment and normal teacher attrition, three factors drive this tremendous demand for new teachers: class size reduction, a demographic bulge of teachers approaching retirement, and an attrition rate among new teachers that ranges from 35 to 50 percent nationwide during the first five years.¹

One might argue that there is no period as important to a teacher's career as the first few years of teaching. For the first time, novice teachers are fully responsible for blending the insights learned from their own educational experiences and the pedagogical theory gleaned from teacher education programs with the reality of inspiring and managing the learning of their students on a day-to-day basis.

These initial years are also important in that early experiences serve to set the professional norms, attitudes, and standards that will guide practice over the course of a career. Additionally, a growing body of research substantiates the crucial link between student achievement and the quality of a teacher's instruction.² The challenge, therefore, is how can the teaching profession induct large numbers of new colleagues in ways that promote high levels of classroom practice, seek to ensure

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the academic success of all students, and encourage new ways of being in schools for novice and veteran teachers alike.

Trial-by-Fire Won't Meet This Challenge

Historically, little attention has been paid to the development, in particular the induction, of education's prime resource—its teachers. The traditional method of launching a teacher's career rests on the myth that teacher credential program graduates are prepared to teach unassisted in a classroom. Yet regardless of how good their preparation has been, teachers in their first classroom face an overwhelming number of complex problems. Often these issues must be dealt with quickly and, in the traditional system, without anyone to turn to for advice. New teachers working in isolation navigate a slow and painful learning curve. This trial-by-fire method exacts a high price on new teachers, their students, and the entire school community. Faced with a multitude of problems and a lack of support, too many new teachers become disillusioned, and many bright and talented new teachers are driven out of the profession.³

Induction programs, virtually unknown two decades ago, carry a weighty burden of responsibility. The goal of these programs must be not only to retain teachers, but also to promote ambitious levels of classroom instruction that will help all students be successful. Induction experiences have the potential to frame the future of the teaching profession, as it will be practiced for the next thirty years. The large numbers of beginning teachers in America's classrooms offer the professional community a unique opportunity to create induction models that challenge the educational *status quo*. In addition, induction programs can represent a new conceptualization of teacher development in which the responsibility for teacher learning is shared across traditional institutional boundaries by linking university teacher preparation with inservice learning.

Quality Induction—Essential Components

A survey of the research literature on teacher induction indicates that this is a unique phase of teacher development, as well as a period of enculturation and socialization.⁴ It has been noted that induction will happen, with or without a program.⁵ Thus, it is critical that educational leaders who design programs to support new teachers must ask the following essential questions: "Induction into what, and for what purpose?" Quality induction must consciously set and clearly articulate new professional norms and expectations. New teachers must be supported in taking responsibility not only for what goes on in their classrooms, but also for what transpires in the greater educational community of which they are a part. Preeminent among these responsibilities are the quality of their own classroom instruction and accountability for the achievement of every student. High expectations, knowledge of how to create equitable learning experiences, and a firm belief

in the power of the classroom teacher to effect student learning must be at the heart of every induction program.

If induction programs are to live up to their potential, a number of essential components must be in place. These include the following:

I. Program Vision

Quality new teacher programs need to recognize the significance of teacher induction. Program leaders must aspire to more than retention; instead, they must seek to promote the highest quality of instruction possible. This requires accepting the responsibility for creating new professional expectations, for setting high standards and the organizational systems needed to support every teacher in reaching those levels of accomplishment.

This sort of advocacy demands a clear vision of how quality induction can help create a new kind of professionalism among all teachers. It demands program leaders who constantly ask, "What is our vision for teachers and students, and how will this program help realize this vision?" Anything less runs the risk of creating an induction program that perpetuates the traditional ways of being in schools and inducts teachers into the norms of isolation, low expectations, and inefficacy.

New teacher programs, therefore, cannot be preparing teachers for mere survival in the complex and demanding world of today's schools. Instead, these programs must also have as part of their vision a new image of the successful teacher whose leadership capacity is developed from the moment the teacher enters a classroom. Induction programs have the potential to become one of the most powerful forces for educational change and professional renewal in the history of public education. The opportunity is there, and the most effective programs will be those that clearly recognize this potential.

2. Institutional Commitment and Support

School districts and other educational organizations must make teacher learning a priority. Institutional commitment can be demonstrated by designing programs that ensure adequate time and resources for new teacher learning and mentor development, by establishing policies that protect new teachers during the critical stage of induction, and by making teacher development the centerpiece of educational reform across the district.

New teachers are often given the most demanding assignments with inadequate resources despite the fact that "teaching efficacy" has been shown to be a factor influenced by teacher assignment.⁶ But when local teacher organizations, top-level district administration, and site administrators all hold new teacher support as a high priority, they can work as partners to design policies that shelter new teachers from inappropriate assignments and working conditions. Clear lines of ongoing communication and strong cooperation between curriculum and instruction divisions and human resources administration can also help this change. Contractually bargained

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conditions of teacher placement should reflect an understanding of new teachers' needs and support placements mindful of the novice's developmental level.

This sort of multidimensional collaboration across programs, stakeholder groups, and educational organizations requires careful program coordination. Induction efforts need innovative, full-time program administrators who have the time and resources to focus adequate attention on new teachers. At the same time, successful induction programs demonstrate flexibility and seek integration with site- and district-level reform initiatives while balancing the new teacher's already steep learning curve with the needs of these local improvement efforts.

3. Quality Mentoring

Just as the classroom teacher is widely considered the essential ingredient for student learning and educational reform, so, too, is the new teacher mentor the most important feature of any high quality induction program. No technology, no curriculum, no standardized structures can substitute for the power of a knowledgeable and skillful veteran to move a novice teacher to ambitious levels of teaching. Quality mentoring requires careful selection, training, and on-going support.

Mentors must be carefully selected. Not every outstanding classroom teacher is necessarily a talented mentor. Selection criteria include: strong interpersonal skills, credibility with peers and administrators, a demonstrated curiosity and eagerness to learn, respect for multiple perspectives, and outstanding instructional practice.

Supporting new teachers is complex and demanding work, and it involves learning skills other than those that most classroom teachers possess. It is critical, therefore, that we think not only about what a new teacher needs to be successful but also what a mentor teacher needs to know and be able to do in order to support a new teacher. The pedagogy of mentoring includes an in-depth understanding of teacher development, professional teaching standards, performance assessment, and student content standards, along with strategies for classroom observation and a variety of coaching techniques. This learning occurs most successfully when mentors are given regular opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and to problem-solve issues of practice.

4. Professional Standards

Occasional mentoring and "feel-good" support overlook the enormous instructional impact induction programs can have when they are focused on a teacher's classroom practice. Clearly-articulated standards of professional practice, such as the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)*, are essential in helping both the novice teacher and their mentor communicate effectively about and keep all eyes focused on high quality teaching and increased student learning. Successful induction programs recognize that the language and concepts of good teaching must be embedded and modeled throughout the professional environ-

ment—in support structures, assessment tools, professional development, mentor preparation, and, when possible, teacher evaluation.

It is also imperative that new teacher programs recognize the period of induction (two to three years) as an important and essential phase of teacher learning.⁷ Professional standards should be used then to guide new teacher learning and growth in meaningful ways, by helping these novices: set clear, significant, and achievable goals; reflect upon and articulate successes and challenges; identify effective practices in their own classrooms and others' classrooms; guide new learning and next steps; and recognize the complexity of good teaching and the need for career-long professional development.

In a developmental context, standards “up the ante” by helping new teachers craft a professional vision of ambitious teaching. However, it is essential that local induction programs ensure that that image of quality teaching also reflects the complexities of teaching in a diverse society. Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy must be at the heart of every induction program, and new teachers must be constantly supported in examining and responding to the unique needs of their students.

5. Classroom-Based Teacher Learning

Teacher learning that involves on-going “joint work” in the context of a teacher’s classroom is arguably the most significant form of professional development.⁸ Successful induction programs, therefore, embed opportunities for teacher growth into the daily lives of beginning teachers in response to the unique and diverse needs of each teacher’s classroom setting. The most effective mentors are those that intimately know the community, school-site, and classroom context of their novice partners; this enables them to provide support that is responsive to the assessed, individual needs of their beginning teachers. This requires ample time for observation, collaborative lesson design, model teaching, veteran teacher observation, reflection, analysis of student work, goal-setting, and assessment against professional standards. Furthermore, in the process of providing support based on the assessment of a beginning teacher’s practice, the mentor also models for the novice the importance of designing classroom instruction based on assessed student needs.

Strong mentors partner with their new teachers not only to help each novice understand how best to meet the learning needs of their own students, but how to understand, make meaning of, and use the various curriculum frameworks, standardized assessments, and grade-level expectations that are an important part of the new teacher’s context. This can not happen in a one-size-fits-all model of support. Effective induction programs help new teachers become on-the-job learners, who are constantly questioning and systematically inquiring into their classroom practice with a focus on student learning.

Well-balanced programs of new teacher support also provide opportunities for novices to come together with other beginning teachers to learn from each other and to discuss issues and concerns with those having similar experiences. Strategies for

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learning together, both inside and outside the school, are widely recognized as important features of professional development.⁹ Networking events help promote system-wide values at the same time they help new teachers develop a perspective informed by colleagues in other contexts.

Teacher Induction: A Catalyst for Change

Ideally, an investment in teacher quality starts at the earliest stages of a teacher's career and continues throughout a professional lifetime. The time has come for universities and schools, administrators, teachers, unions, and teacher educators to break set by coming together to build a comprehensive model of teacher development that begins in pre-service and continues throughout a teacher's entire career. This work is about establishing system-wide norms and practices of professionalism, career-long learning, and inquiry into the practice of teaching.

In such systems, induction not only serves as an engine to drive educational reform but also offers veteran teachers new professional roles that capitalize on their wisdom and expertise. Mentoring a new teacher helps the veteran learn and grow as never before. The veteran teacher has a chance to step out of their classroom and observe in many different teaching situations. This broadens their perspective of effective teaching, allows them to put into words the expertise they have developed over their career, and gives them a chance to reflect on their own practice.

Thus, quality induction programs act as a catalyst for changing school cultures and improving the teaching profession. Powerful new models of teacher induction offer points of intersection where veterans and novices learn together as they reinvent the way teachers interact with one another. This kind of shared learning and collaboration is contagious. Hand in hand, mentors and their new teacher partners are leading school communities in providing high quality and equitable instruction for all students.

Notes

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