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The efficacy of teacher education institutions as providers of supportive services to beginning teachers

Abstract

The induction phase of a beginning teacher's career is significant and fraught with difficulty. This review of the literature focuses on the influence and effectiveness of teacher education institutions as sources of support for beginning teachers in their initiation into the profession. Supportive services within the province of the teacher education institution are discussed including resource and research support, professional development opportunities, networking and communications support, and on-site assistance. Benefits of collaborative induction efforts between teacher education institutions and local school districts are investigated, as well as obstacles to the effective implementation of such programs.

**THE EFFICACY OF
TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
AS PROVIDERS OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES
TO BEGINNING TEACHERS**

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**The Efficacy of Teacher Education Institutions
as Providers of Supportive Services to Beginning Teachers**

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ABSTRACT

The induction phase of a beginning teacher's career is significant and fraught with difficulty. This review of the literature focuses on the influence and effectiveness of teacher education institutions as sources of support for beginning teachers in their initiation into the profession. Supportive services within the province of the teacher education institution are discussed including resource and research support, professional development opportunities, networking and communications support, and on-site assistance. Benefits of collaborative induction efforts between teacher education institutions and local school districts are investigated, as well as obstacles to the effective implementation of such programs.

The single most influential factor in my growth and development as a professional educator relates to my mentoring experience as a beginning teacher. Without the emotional support and instructional guidance of my mentor, I could not have coped effectively with the enormity of responsibilities, difficulties, and anxieties which constitute the trial-by-fire known as the first year of teaching. Despite the stress and storm of my first year, it was, in retrospect, a positive experience enhanced through maturation and reflection, largely due to the effective support I received. However, a remarkably high number of beginning teachers experience little or no support, precipitating a negative impression of the teaching profession after their first year, often resulting in high burnout and turnover rates. This neglect of our novice teaching force must be addressed.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDUCTION PERIOD

Induction as a Developmental Phase

Induction is a rite of initiation and "integration into the professional and social fabric of the school, district, and community" (Letven, 1992, p. 59). It is during this time that novices are concerned with achieving a level of acceptance and comfort within the daily tasks and issues of the workplace. Many other professions recognize the value of a supervised induction period, yet novice teachers are often left to their own devices to solve their problems—alone and isolated in their classrooms, often placed in the most difficult and challenging assignments with the same responsibilities as a seasoned teacher (Colbert & Wolff, 1992; Gordon, 1991; Henry, 1989). Beginning teachers report feelings of anxiety, stress, inadequacy and loneliness (Green, Roebuck & Futrell, 1994). Compounding the emotional needs of novice teachers are other difficulties encountered in the daily life of the classroom including unclear expectations and inadequate resources (Gordon, 1991). A number of studies indicate that beginning teachers continue to report problems in dealing with classroom discipline, motivation of students, individual learning differences,

assessment of student work, parent relationships and organization of classwork (Veenman, 1984).

It appears that a conflict exists between novice teacher expectations and the reality of the classroom situation (Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989). Veenman (1984) defines this phenomenon of "reality shock" as "the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of classroom life" (p. 143). Without appropriate support, many beginning teachers cannot recover from this shock, resulting in high attrition rates. An estimated 30% of educators leave the profession within the first two years and almost 40% exit within five years (Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990). It is notably distressing that within the first five years of teaching service the most academically talented leave in the greatest numbers (Heyns, 1988; Schlecty & Vance, 1981, 1983).

The Need for Effective Induction Support

The research clearly documents that making the transition from student teacher to practitioner is fraught with difficulty (Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, Kay & Edelfelt, 1989) yet "teaching, as a profession, has been slow to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into the complexities of a job that demands hundreds of management decisions every day" (Colbert & Wolff, 1992, p. 193). The demanding nature of this transition highlights the need for highly specialized, well-planned, and thoughtfully implemented inservice training (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987; Veenman, 1984). The Association of Teacher Educators recommended in its report Restructuring the Education of Teachers (1991) that four essential services be provided to novice teachers:

- a) continuing personal support; b) education experiences that extend and enrich their initial preparation and address the particular demands of their teaching situation; c) positive socialization into the profession of teaching; and d) continual systematic assessment of and feedback on their teaching performance and progress, including processes for self-assessment and reflection (p. 16).

The "Crystallization Factor"

Perhaps the most compelling reason to advocate supportive services for novice teachers is that the induction phase of a teacher's career is a "crystallizing moment"—a time when the patterns of teaching behavior and attitudes take on definite and permanent form. In essence, the experiences of the first year of teaching shape and influence a teacher throughout the duration of a career, for better or worse (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Liebert, 1989; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990). It is at this time of a teacher's career that he or she is most impressionable; therefore, it is the most opportune time to reinforce the "practices and theories taught in the teacher education program" (Ishler, 1997), and who is more qualified to do so than teacher education institutions?

The Impact of Effective Induction Support on Teacher Retention

Teacher retention has been affected positively by effective induction practices, especially those implemented in collaboration between teacher education institutions and local school districts. Odell and Ferraro (1992) found that four years after participating in a collaborative induction program 96% of the beginning teachers were still teaching and reported valuing emotional support above all (p. 200). Colbert and Wolff (1992) found in their study of beginning teachers in urban centers that, three years after participating in a collaborative mentoring program, 99% were still in teaching, as compared to their district's rate of less than 50% retention previous to the implementation of the induction program.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES WITHIN THE CAPACITY

OF THE TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The Responsibility and Opportunity of Educational Leadership

The National Council on Accreditation for Teacher Education [NCATE] indicated in their 1989-1994 standards that teacher education institutions have an obligation to provide support to their graduates (Gold, 1996; Ishler & Selke, 1994; Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989). Unfortunately, the 1995 version of the standards no longer contains such a criterion,

calling into question the role of teacher education institutions in providing induction support (Peg Ishler, personal communication, June 20, 1997).

However, many institutions of teacher education are involved in induction programs already. Johnston and Kay (1987) found in their study of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE] member institutions that about half of those surveyed were involved in implementation or planning of support programs. Ishler and Selke (1994) found that 70% of the institutions they surveyed had met the NCATE standard for providing support to graduates, indicating an increase in support plans among its members. These findings are promising for novice teachers as "continued university affiliation may be enough to assist beginning teachers in remaining open to new ideas, suggestions, and perceptions concerning teaching process and self-reflection" (Klug & Salzman, 1991, p. 16). Gold (1996, p. 582) states that "universities have an important role in leading teacher education for both preservice preparation and beginning teacher induction. A critical factor in exercising this leadership is in developing productive working relationships with local schools." Clearly institutions of teacher education have a unique window of opportunity to demonstrate leadership in professional development and significantly influence their graduates and the education profession through collaboration in providing supportive services to novice teachers. Such an opportunity must not be disregarded or taken lightly.

Quality Criteria for Effective Support Services

The research supports a broad-based continuum of systemic support services for beginning teachers defined by collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools, districts, and area education agencies. This system of services should recognize a diversity of needs and be characterized by flexibility in order to be effectively assistive (Letven, 1992). The support system should "provide a framework for beginning teachers to enter the profession successfully" within a "safe context for personal and professional

growth...experimentation and reflection" (MacIsaac, 1990, p. 6). Finally, Henry (1989) espouses the criterion that support should focus on relevant daily problem-solving strategies, link teacher education to teacher practice, and its nature should be supervisory though non-evaluative.

Types of Support Services Within Teacher Education Institutions

The literature reveals that many teacher education institutions are already providing a number of support services that can enhance the beginning teacher's first experience and education in general. These services range in nature from resource and research support and professional development opportunities to networking and communications support and on-site assistance.

Resource and Research Support. Teacher preparation institutions are ideal places to find expertise and research on best practice in teaching and teacher development. Therefore, institutions of higher education can be a tremendous source of support in developing and implementing induction programs (Ware, 1992), creating appropriate research-based materials (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Ware), serving in a consultation capacity (Johnston & Kay, 1987), and providing assistance with grant writing (Ware).

Opportunities for Professional Development. This practice is also well within the jurisdiction of the teacher preparation institution according to Yarger-Kane and Buck (1989, as cited in Ware, 1992, p. 6), "institutions of higher education possess the human resources with the knowledge, talents, and skill necessary to initiate and sustain programs of study, courses, conferences, and workshops which can promote what is good for education at all levels." A number of professional development and continuing education services can be offered to beginning teachers and their mentors and administrators at the university level through orientations, workshops, and graduate courses and seminars (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987; MacIsaac & Brookhart, 1994; Ware, 1992). Colbert & Wolff (1992) found that university courses attended by both the beginning

teacher and their mentors alleviated new teacher isolation and created the opportunity to collaborate in implementing strategies learned with support, assistance, and peer feedback.

Some teacher education colleges offer specific programs of study for both mentors and inductees leading to a master's degree or other programs such as a Teacher Support Specialist endorsement for master teachers/mentors (Ishler & Selke, 1994). Conferences, such as the Iowa Lieutenant Governor's Conference for Beginning and Master Teachers which is held annually and sponsored by a consortium of professional associations and teacher preparation institutions, are another example of appropriate support that teacher preparation institutions can provide.

Networking and Communications Support. Teacher education institutions can provide emotional and instructional support to beginning teachers through a number of activities. Some schools offer a "teacher hotline" or free 800 number for beginning teachers to seek assistance (Ishler, 1997; Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987). With the new multimedia technology available, many schools are creating teleconferencing and computer network opportunities such as the Beginning Teacher Computer Network at Harvard Graduate School of Education (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987; Merseth, 1990). These options are especially advantageous in bridging distances and uniting graduates outside of their preparation institutions' service areas. Computer networks are a convenient, non-threatening environment and have been found to reduce beginning teacher isolation and loneliness (Merseth, 1990).

Another networking service is the organization and sponsorship of informal gatherings, support meetings or cohort groups for beginning teachers (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987). At Iowa State University, the College of Education is piloting a cohort group program that forms small groups of both secondary and elementary education majors at the beginning of their preparation program. These groups take courses and practica together that are intended to provide members with a strong source of support

throughout the teacher preparation program, student teaching and induction (Gayle Huey, personal communication, June 22, 1997).

On-Site Assistance. Many colleges of education coordinate their preservice and induction programs in order to provide a continuity of supportive service (Ware, 1992). Some colleges of education view induction programs as a natural extension of teacher preparation and have taken advantage of the field supervision and formal on-site visitation mechanism that is already in place for student teaching, even assigning student teaching supervisors to continue advisement and follow-up with their students as they begin teaching their first year (Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987; Liebert, 1989).

A few visionaries have sought to enhance traditional mentoring dyads (mentor-beginning teacher) by creating a team approach. The induction team usually consists of a mentor, an administrator, and a representative from a teacher education institution. This team meets regularly with the beginning teacher over the course of the year. The addition of the university-based teacher educator enhances the induction experience in several capacities: serving as an additional role model for the beginning teacher, facilitating for mutual support, relationship-building and validation, lending formality and structure to the induction process, and assisting as objective observer and resource person outside the public school system (Klug & Salzman, 1991; Liebert, 1989). Gordon states that "an induction team is more likely to provide the best chance for a beginner's success than any single support person operating alone (1991, p.10).

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE INDUCTION EFFORTS

Collaborative efforts between university-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators provide complementary types of support bridging academic theory preparation and best professional practice in the classroom resulting in opportunities to work together to solve problems of mutual interest and benefit (Auger & Odell, 1992; Green, Roebuck & Futtrell, 1994; Henry, 1989; Liebert, 1989; MacIsaac & Brookhart,

1994). Klug and Salzman (1991, p. 16) found that collaboration "increased dialogue between university and school-based personnel which led to improved understandings regarding the nature of the teaching process as understood by both institutions." Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, Kay and Edelfelt (1989, p.68) found that collaborative activities result in "more shared responsibility for teacher education, more precise identification of competencies required of beginning teachers in the preservice curriculum, and more feedback to the college of education on whether new teachers are adequately prepared to begin teaching." It is evident that all participants stand to benefit from collaborative support practices.

Benefits for the Teacher Education Institution

Collaborative induction practices benefit the teacher education institution by enhancing curriculum development in teacher preparation, strengthening the teacher preparation program, and providing a catalyst for educational reform.

Enhancing Curriculum Development in Teacher Preparation. The data obtained through participation in induction programs can be an enlightening and rich resource as to the currently expressed needs of beginning teachers which can then inform the process of creating effective preparation and induction practices (Liebert, 1989). Induction programs provide immediate feedback on the quality of the teacher preparation program and reveal strategies for assisting beginning teachers in becoming leading professionals (Gordon, 1991; Ishler & Selke, 1994; Klug & Salzman, 1991). Collaborative efforts are valuable in that they keep professors current in school-based practices and assist teacher preparation programs in updating, enhancing and reflecting on curriculum (Gordon, 1991; Ishler & Selke; 1994).

Strengthening the Teacher Preparation Program. Collaborative induction efforts serve to buttress the foundation laid in the teacher preparation program. "The teacher education model that shaped the beginner can be reinforced when the beginner is most

vulnerable to reshaping in order to 'survive' " (Ishler & Selke, 1994, p. 16). Without support, beginning teachers may not be able to implement the effective teaching practices they learned in the preparation program (Ishler, 1997). Liebert (1989) asserts that it is the continuity of teacher education support that aids novice teachers in transferring theory into practice. It seems that teacher educators can protect their investments in their students by supporting them through the induction stage.

Providing a Catalyst for Educational Reform. MacIsaac (1990, p. 11) notes that induction practices can be more than a means of addressing the needs of beginning teachers—collaborative efforts can be a "catalyst for change fostered through relationships designed and facilitated by committed individuals." The collegial support encouraged by such collaboration can increase the college of education's talent and expertise pool from which to hire adjunct instructors (Auger & Odell, 1992; MacIsaac & Brookhart, 1994) and can lead to the establishment of additional collaborative efforts such as those found by Auger and Odell (1992) including 1) team teaching of methods courses by school and university-based teacher educators which served to transform their teacher preparation program, 2) a teacher enhancement program for veteran teacher renewal, and 3) a career development program leading to licensure and certification for teacher aides and associates.

Benefits to Experienced Professionals

The experienced practitioners who work with beginning teachers in the schools also stand to benefit from the support of collaboration with teacher education institutions.

Mentors. Perhaps the most common of induction practices is mentoring or the assignment of an experienced teacher to guide a novice through the induction process (Association of Teacher Educators [ATE], 1991; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Ganser, 1992; Harris, 1991; Ishler & Selke, 1994; Johnston & Kay, 1987; Klug & Salzman, 1991; MacIsaac & Brookhart, 1994; Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990; Ware, 1992). Though this practice is overwhelmingly popular, many mentors are unprepared to take on the

responsibilities of such a role. My own mentor, who was a tremendous source of emotional support for me, confessed she was often unsure how to aid me in areas such as parent communication and classroom management, feeling she and, therefore, I could have certainly benefited from training in mentoring principles (Jean Prestemon, personal communication, June 20, 1997). The effectiveness of best mentoring practice depends on mentors "who are formally trained to provide expert clinical training and personal support" (ATE, p. 12).

Reiman and Edelfelt (1990, p. 1) found that beginning mentors who experienced a rigorous training program reported achieving "significant personal and professional growth." Mentoring offers experienced teachers renewal opportunities in working with novice teachers and new career options within the teaching field and without leaving the classroom (Auger & Odell, 1992).

The research indicates that mentors appreciate university teacher educators' assistance and training in effective teaching strategies, adult development and learning theory, clinical supervision and observation strategies, problem-solving and troubleshooting ideas, communication and conflict resolution, and advisement for handling interpersonal difficulties (Klug & Salzman, 1991; Reiman & Edelfelt, 1990; Ware, 1992). These areas of concern expressed by mentor teachers can create a framework for training in effective mentoring principles.

Administrators. Klug and Salzman (1991) found that administrators reported having appreciation for teacher education institution support in working with beginning teachers who are having adjustment difficulties and as a link between the administration and beginning teachers who are often afraid of seeking an administrator's assistance for fear of appearing inadequate. Training in mentoring principles was also found to be beneficial to administrators as well.

Benefits to the Beginning Teacher

Most importantly, numerous studies have indicated that beginning teachers benefit from collaborative support programs emotionally and instructionally. Colbert and Wolff (1992, p. 197) found that novices who were trained in collaborative induction programs were found to "use more effective instructional planning practices, provided more learning opportunities for students, and had higher student engagement rates" than non-participants. Improved classroom instruction was cited in other studies as well (Harris, 1991; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). Beginning teachers reported benefiting from having a university educator as a "safe" sounding board outside of the school district, as an additional provider of resources, and as a role model who is committed to and enthusiastic about the field of education.

OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME IN FORGING

COLLABORATIVE INDUCTION PARTNERSHIPS

While collaborative induction programs offer tremendous promise, a number of obstacles exist which impede progress in forming appropriate and effective relationships. Collaboration "demands time, effort, energy and funds... there may be initial opposition to participation" (Green, Roebuck & Futrell, 1994).

Lack of Higher Education Administrative Support

The Tenure Track. Higher education faculty are traditionally expected to fulfill three responsibilities to their professions: teaching, scholarship, and service. There is an increasing trend to place emphasis on faculty scholarship productivity over service and teaching in terms of tenure attainment and salary issues (Johnston & Kay, 1987; Ishler and Selke, 1994). The university reward system does not frequently support faculty service commitments; therefore working in the field with beginning teachers usually does not enhance one's opportunity for tenure and promotion.

Availability of Funds. Programs without the benefits of administratively-sanctioned funds can not survive. Financial resources must be made available in order to assure induction program success (Johnston & Kay, 1987; Ware, 1992). Previous to state mandates and NCATE standards, there was little indication that teacher education institutions felt a responsibility to provide their graduates with supportive services (Ishler & Selke, 1994), and without state-mandated money, there is little money available in the typical college of education's budget to be allotted for former students who are no longer paying tuition.

Lack of Support from Higher Education Faculty

Many teacher educators are reluctant to support induction programs due to increasing demands for scholarship and overloaded teaching assignments and duties (Johnston & Kay; 1987). It can be damaging to an educator's promotion opportunities to deeply invest in service commitments at the expense of scholarship productivity (Ishler & Selke, 1994). Those who do take on such service commitments, often do so without compensatory pay and on a voluntary basis (Johnston & Kay, 1997). This leaves the induction program dependent on the interest of individual faculty rather than systematic support (Johnston & Kay, 1987; Ware, 1992) and, therefore, subject to high turnover and lack of continuity.

For instance, at the University of Northern Iowa, a professor received a National Science Foundation Grant to fund a mentoring program for beginning math and science teachers. Once the grant funding ran dry, there were no other available funds to support the program though it continued for some time on a voluntary basis (Joan Duea, personal communication, May 11, 1997). Recently, the organizing professor retired, and the impetus for such a program left with her.

Lack of Support from School-Based Personnel

There is a perception among school-based teacher educators that university faculty are too far removed from the classroom to be a source of effective support (Colbert & Wolff, 1992). This results in a resistance from school personnel to be receptive to input from university-based teacher educators about the needs of beginning teachers, rendering university personnel powerless in aiding former students within the social and institutional structure of schools (Johnston & Kay, 1987). Without recognition of each other's value and potential contributions and expertise in supporting the beginning teacher, collaborative induction programs are doomed to mediocrity, at best.

Lack of Societal Support

There exist several societal perceptions which impede the development of collaborative induction programs. The public perception to improving teaching with competency tests is a non-assistive approach and implies that teachers are essentially a "bad product" which must be fixed (Veenman, 1984; Harris, 1991). Lack of recognition of the induction problem in terms of legislative financial support is another societal issue to contend with as well (Veenman, 1984).

CONCLUSION

Society in general, and teacher education institutions in particular, must come to the realization that beginning teachers need to be nurtured in order to grow into professional and effective educators. When we do not support our children's teachers in their professional development, we are, in essence, sabotaging our students' learning. Collaborative support practices show promise as a tool of reform in the preparation of our nation's teachers and the enhancement of the educational system. However, Feiman-Nemser (1996, p.1) states the caveat that in order for the practice of mentoring to truly accomplish educational reform "it must be linked to a vision of good teaching, guided by an understanding of teacher learning, and supported by a professional culture that favors

collaboration and inquiry." Teacher education institutions must take the initiative in breaking down barriers and forging collaborative partnerships for the successful induction of beginning teachers into the profession. The viability and reputation of teacher education institutions depend substantially on the success of their graduates. Therefore, teacher education institutions have a vested interest in and responsibility for fostering successful transition from student teacher to professional practitioner.

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