

Orientation and Induction of the Beginning Teacher

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ABSTRACT

Despite efforts to help beginning teachers succeed, many still experience problems, ranging from feelings of isolation to lack of support from experienced teachers and supervisors. The result is that nearly 50% of potentially talented and creative teachers leave the profession within five years. Ways to help beginning teachers succeed include providing professional development geared specifically toward the needs of beginning teachers; peer coaching or mentoring; easing up on the assignment of extra-class duties during the first year of service; and engaging beginning teachers in a reflective practice approach.

What are the general needs of the beginning teacher? Most schools plan for teacher orientation, but in spite of efforts to help teachers succeed, many still encounter adjustment problems. A review of the research on problems of beginning teachers shows that feelings of isolation; poor understanding of what is expected of them; workload and extra assignments that they were unprepared to handle; lack of supplies, materials, or equipment; poor physical facilities; and lack of support or help from experienced teachers or supervisors contribute to their feelings of frustration and failure (Rubinstein, 2010; Veenman, 1984). The result is that many potentially talented and creative teachers find teaching unrewarding and difficult, especially in inner-city schools; and nearly 50% of newly hired teachers leave the profession within five years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

The Induction Period

There is recognition that the induction period, the first two or three years of teaching, is critical in developing teachers' capabilities, and that beginning teachers should not be left alone to sink or swim (Clement, 2011). Several state education agencies, including California, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, have recently developed internship programs for new teachers (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012), while other states have increased staff development activities (Bishop, 2011; Lieberman, 2012). However,

most important for the professional development of new teachers are the internal support systems and strategies that the schools adopt (that is, the daily support activities and continual learning opportunities) (Breux, 2011).

In general, having to learn by trial and error without support and supervision has been the most common problem faced by new teachers (Marzano, 2011). Expecting teachers to function without support is based on the false assumptions that (a) teachers are well prepared for their initial classroom and school experiences, (b) teachers can develop professional expertise on their own, and (c) teaching can be mastered in a relatively short period of time. Researchers find that there is little attempt to lighten the class load and limit extra-class assignments to make the beginning teacher's job easier. In the few schools that do limit these activities, teachers have reported that they have had the opportunity to "learn to teach" (Cohen, 2010).

Unquestionably, new teachers need the feedback and encouragement experienced teachers can provide. Peer coaching or mentoring is gaining support as an effective supervision tool (Lieberman, 2011; McDermott, 2011). *Peer coaching or mentoring* takes place when classroom teachers observe one another, provide feedback concerning their teaching, and together develop instructional plans (Burley, 2011). According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010), an experienced teacher who acts as a peer coach or mentor teacher for an inexperienced teacher performs five functions: (a) *companionship*, discussing ideas, problems, and successes; (b) *technical feedback*, especially related to lesson planning and classroom observations; (c) *analysis of application*, integrating what happens or what works as part of the beginning teacher's repertoire; (d) *adaptation*, helping the beginning teacher adapt to particular situations; and (e) *personal facilitation*, helping the teacher feel good about self after trying new strategies. Others suggest that the main features of a successful mentoring program include (a) proximity, (b) grade equivalence (at the elementary level), (c) subject equivalence (at the secondary level), and (d) compatibility (in terms of personality, experiences, and educational philosophy) (Barkley, 2010; Wright, 2010).

Reflective Practice

Perhaps the most important ingredient for a peer coach, mentor, or resource teacher is to allow new teachers to *reflect*, not react or defend (Ghaye, 2011; Richards, 2011). An integral part of any good program for helping novice teachers is for them to observe experienced teachers on a regular basis, then for experienced teachers to observe novice teachers. With both observational formats, there is need to discuss what facilitated or hindered the teaching-learning process and precisely what steps or recommendations are needed for improving instruction (Frey, 2011; McDonagh, 2011). The peer coach or mentor needs to serve as a friend and confidante, that is, function in a non-evaluative role. The term *peer sharing and caring* among colleagues best describe the new spirit of collegial openness and learning advocated here.

Guidelines for Improving Support for Beginning Teachers

Whatever the existing policies regarding the induction period for entry teachers, there is the need to improve provisions for their continued professional development (Friedman, 2012), to make the job easier, to make them feel more confident in the classroom and school, to reduce the isolation of their work settings, and to enhance interaction with colleagues (Burley, 2011). Here are some recommendations that school principals can implement for achieving these goals (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, in press; Lunenburg & Irby, 2006).

- Principals need to schedule beginning teacher orientation in addition to regular teacher orientation. Beginning teachers need to attend both sessions.
- Principals need to appoint someone to help beginning teachers set up their classrooms.
- Principals need to provide beginning teachers with a proper mix of courses, students, facilities (not all leftovers). If possible, lighten their load for the first year.
- Principals need to assign extra-class duties of moderate difficulty and requiring moderate amounts of time, duties that will not become too demanding for the beginning teacher.
- Principals need to pair beginning teachers with master teachers to meet regularly to identify general problems before they become serious.
- Principals need to provide coaching groups, tutor groups, or collaborative problem-solving groups for all beginning teachers to attend. Encourage beginning teachers to teach each other.
- Principals need to provide for joint planning, team teaching, committee assignments, and other cooperative arrangements between new and experienced teachers.
- Principals need to issue newsletters that report on accomplishments of all teachers, especially beginning teachers.
- Principals need to schedule reinforcing events, involving beginning and experienced teachers, such as tutor-tutoree luncheons, parties, and awards.
- Principals need to provide regular (monthly) meetings between the beginning teacher and supervisor (mentor) to identify problems as soon as possible and to make recommendations for improvement.
- Principals need to plan special and continuing in-service activities with topics directly related to the needs and interests of beginning teachers. Eventually, integrate beginning professional development activities with regular professional development activities.
- Principals need to carry on regular evaluation of beginning teachers; evaluate strengths and weaknesses, present new information, demonstrate new skills, and provide opportunities for practice and feedback.

Conclusion

Despite efforts to help beginning teachers succeed, many still experience problems, ranging from feelings of isolation to lack of support from experienced teachers and supervisors. The result is that nearly 50% of potentially talented and creative teachers leave the profession within five years. Ways to help beginning teachers succeed include providing professional development geared specifically toward the needs of beginning teachers; peer coaching or mentoring; easing up on the assignment of extra-class duties during the first year of service; and engaging beginning teachers in a reflective practice approach.

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