

Growing Pains:

Giving New Teachers the Tools and Tips They Need to Survive the Early Years and Combat Attrition

by Taryn VanderPyl
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Abstract

This article examines past research about new teacher induction and the success or potential of such programs. Additional research was then conducted and results are detailed based on the needs as determined by current student teachers from the Arizona State University College of Teacher Education and Leadership and their mentors. Finally, the intervention based on these unfulfilled needs is a concise, new teacher resource website that is further described in this article.

There is neither doubt nor argument that teaching is an extremely challenging profession. Entrance in to this field is a complex, diverse, and difficult experience of extensive pre-service education, “jumping through hoops” of all shapes and sizes, and then diving in to a battlefield of such that no textbook, lecture, or training can fully equip the new recruit.

Novice teachers enter a variety of environments and situations when they start their new careers. Some districts and schools offer training, mentors, induction programs, and support to help these new employees acclimate. Other districts and schools, however, offer little to no support and create the “trial by fire” challenge that has at least partially contributed to the mass attrition plaguing education today (Moir & Gless, 2001).

The data documenting the extreme burnout rate of new teachers is astounding. Moir and Gless (2001) confirm “...an attrition rate among new teachers that ranges from 35 to 50 percent nationwide during the first five years” (p. 109). In addition, “The National Council on Educational Statistics reports that first-year teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than their more experienced counterparts” (MacQueen, 2006).

More important to note, however, is the large number of teachers that “survive” the early years and stay in the profession long term. Thompson states this needed approach best in the welcome message of her book *First-Year Teacher’s Survival Kit*:

It’s not easy being a teacher. You will need to develop heroic qualities: the stamina of an Olympic athlete, diplomacy of a

head of state, the courage of a soldier, and the charisma of a pop star. It sounds like a tremendous challenge, but other teachers have done it, and so can you. After all, someone had to teach those other heroes. Olympic athlete, head of state, soldiers, and pop stars aren't just born that way. Standing behind them - behind every hero - is another hero: a teacher (p. 2).

The success of experienced teachers is not to be taken for granted. Previously an untapped resource, seasoned instructors can be most helpful to new teachers, especially considering the lack of appropriate or truly helpful training these individuals receive as they enter the field.

The pre-service education each new teacher receives provides significant textbook knowledge and academic advice about how to be the "perfect" teacher. In the book *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools*, John Goodlad (1994) states, "observing and talking do not a teacher make." Research has found that most new teachers suffer from what is commonly referred to as "reality shock." "Reality shock" seems to be a major concern of novice teachers... (Silverman & Ennis, 1996). "Reality shock" is described as 'the collapse of the missionary ideals found during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of the classroom life'" (Veenman, 1984, p. 143).

This challenge of facing an unexpected reality is further described by Buchmann and Schwille (1983), "Firsthand experience is trusted implicitly as both means and content of education. It is 'down to earth', personal,

sensory, and practical. Ideas encountered in books are pale in contrast. Compared with life as a school of hard knocks, the school of hard books seems soft and ineffective. Immersion in the 'real world' teaches people to think and act rightly".

Eldar, Nabel, Schechter, Talmor, and Mazin (2003) summarize the effects of personality and individual coping strategies of new teachers by stating, "Despite differences in teachers' personalities, most undergo similar initial processes. ...Undoubtedly, the complex and difficult challenges presented by the system create emotional and physical stresses, and the manner of coping with them will be an important determinant of the novices' ultimate success or failure" (p. 32).

These researchers further explain that a strong personality exhibiting determination, motivation, and a drive to overcome, reflect, and learn from one's own mistakes and achievements will more likely lead to success as a teacher. Rather, a personality filled with self-doubt and poor coping mechanisms faces much higher odds in a successful teaching career (Eldar et al., 2003; Attard & Armour, 2005).

Previous Research

Teachers, no matter how independent and self-sufficient, still need significant training and support from their administration and peers at their new school. Several studies conducted regarding the level of support promised, needed, and/or provided to teachers entering the field show staggering results.

The data collected from this study falls in to three categories: individual reflection, induction

programs, and principal and/or peer support. The table in Appendix B synthesizes the research in each category.

Individual Reflection

Two recent studies focused on individual reflection of the new teacher's own experiences in an effort to learn from successes and failures. This is especially useful when a more extensive support system is not available.

Attard and Armour (2005) kept a reflective journal of Attard's experiences and feelings during his first year of teaching. Following this academic year, the authors compared his experiences and personal reflections to research they had done about the power of being a reflective professional. Attard and Armour determined that part of pre-service training for new teachers should include learning how to reflect and learn from their own experiences (Attard & Armour, 2005).

In a more far-reaching effort, Blake and Monahan (2006) conducted an "action research" study in which graduate interns observed their mentor teachers in the classrooms and recorded details of the classroom environment and the activities of both the students and the teachers. In observing more experienced teachers, new teachers can reflect on what they have seen and learn from the experiences of others. The authors assert that teachers must be carefully trained in the use of "meta-cognitive tools of reflection" to understand the individualized manner of "the students' learning and the corresponding pedagogical instincts and practices" that will lead to success for both the teacher and the students (p. 19).

Induction Programs

Induction programs for new teachers are a popular and timeless recommendation based on extensive academic study.

First, in the article "Quality Induction: An Investment in Teachers", Ellen Moir and Janet Gless look at the teacher shortage as caused by attrition and discuss how to increase retention by providing better training and support for beginning teachers (Moir & Gless, 2001). They state specifically, "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" (Moir & Gless, 2001).

Olebe (2005) looks at her own experiences in teaching and suggests changes to help teachers be more successful in their early years in the profession. She believes the key ingredients to a successful induction program include: individualized teacher support such as mentoring, professional development activities such as in-service training, and employer-sponsored programs and workshops (Olebe, 2005).

Principal and/or Peer Support

Another common theme in the literature is the importance of principals and their support of new teachers. A strong principal begets a strong staff. Quinn and D'Amato Andrews (2004) explain this by saying, "Principals who support their first-year teachers have staffs that are also supportive of those teachers. Principals are the catalyst for the level of overall support the new teachers felt they had and, therefore,

must be taught how to provide the best support for their new employees” (p. 167).

These authors also surveyed first-year teachers in a single school district. They asked them to rank their needs in order of importance from a list of six possibilities: assistance with instruction and curriculum; personal and/or emotional support; access to materials, supplies, and resources; information about school and school district procedures and policies; help with classroom management and discipline; and suggestions for dealing with parents or parent conferences. They determined that principals are the most important factor for new teachers in filling these needs.

In accordance with this study, Wood (2005) researched principals and their role in teacher induction. Principals were surveyed on a Likert-scale questionnaire. School site induction coordinators, teachers, and principals also were all interviewed about new teacher assimilation for qualitative data. Wood concluded that more research as to the role of principals in the induction of novice teachers should be conducted. She did, however, conclude that their role is significant and not to be understated.

In summation, Eldar, Nabel, Schechter, Talmor, and Mazin (2003) conducted an interesting project in which the research team followed three new teachers through their first year in the profession. They interviewed the teachers regarding their difficulties and support mechanisms.

Of the three teachers, one was very successful, one struggled and survived to try another year, and the third suffered such that she chose to leave the profession. They examined the

lessons to be learned from each of these individuals and their experiences – what they could have done better, how to handle situations, etc. They determined what support systems each of these teachers needed that did or would have led to their success. Important factors were reception at the school, involvement with the principal and other teachers, relationship with their students, and their own personal attitude toward the work.

Implication of Previous Research

There is a gap in the previous research regarding how to offer teachers immediate assistance through the Internet. Existing research does not address how websites help teachers with their new careers and how they find the information and help they need.

With this previous research in mind, it is understood that there is a great need for new teachers to have a common and useful resource with insider tips and advice of past survivors in case the three support systems identified in the research are not provided. They need the kind of information and help they will not receive from their university education but will desperately need when they begin their new profession.

Methodology

A needs assessment survey was created that parallels the findings of previous studies regarding the needs of new teachers (Appendix A). This survey was distributed to current undergraduate and graduate students at the Arizona State University College of Teacher Education and Leadership. They were asked to complete the survey themselves

and to ask their mentor teachers with whom they are student teaching to complete the survey as well. The rationale was to gather not only what future teachers feel they need, but also to gather what experienced teachers feel these future teachers will need based on their own experiences when they were the novice.

The survey was distributed two ways: by print flyer to the undergraduate student teachers with a web address for the survey, and by email to the graduate student teachers. There were a total of approximately forty undergraduates and fourteen graduate students, each with a corresponding mentor teacher. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey, but for many of the schools, spring break fell in the middle of the two week period, therefore, preventing some student teachers and mentors from receiving the request and/or completing the survey in time. The dead line was soft as late responses were accepted to further validate the research.

The survey was brief with only fourteen questions and took respondents less than five minutes to complete. Four of the questions were specifically designed to determine demographic information. The next three questions were regarding access to the Internet and the respondents comfort level and frequency of Internet usage. Finally, the last seven questions specifically addressed the main idea of the survey, to clarify the needs of new teachers and how to address these needs through a website available to all.

Results of New Teacher Resource Survey

The results of the needs assessment were collated in a statistical analysis program. There were thirty-six responses to the survey. Of these respondents, twenty-nine were student teachers, two had been teaching seven to ten years, two had been teaching ten to fifteen years, and two had been teaching fifteen to twenty years. All but six respondents were female and most (89%) taught in elementary schools. While the ages ranged from early twenties to late fifties, the average age was thirty to thirty-four and the median age was twenty-five to twenty-nine.

All of the respondents have access to the Internet at least at home and usually (69%) in their classrooms as well. They were all comfortable with the Internet and use it regularly. More specifically, 97% of respondents stated they use teacher resource websites. Some websites they said they use are:

- AtoZTeacherStuff.com,
- EducationWorld.com,
- ABCTeach.com,
- LessonPlansPage.com,
- TheTeachersCorner.net,
- SitesForTeachers.com,
- SchoolExpress.com,
- BusyTeachersCafe.com,
- LearningPage.com,
- ReadingA-Z.com,
- EdHelper.com,
- TeacherPlanet.com,
- Just4Teachers.com,
- and many others.

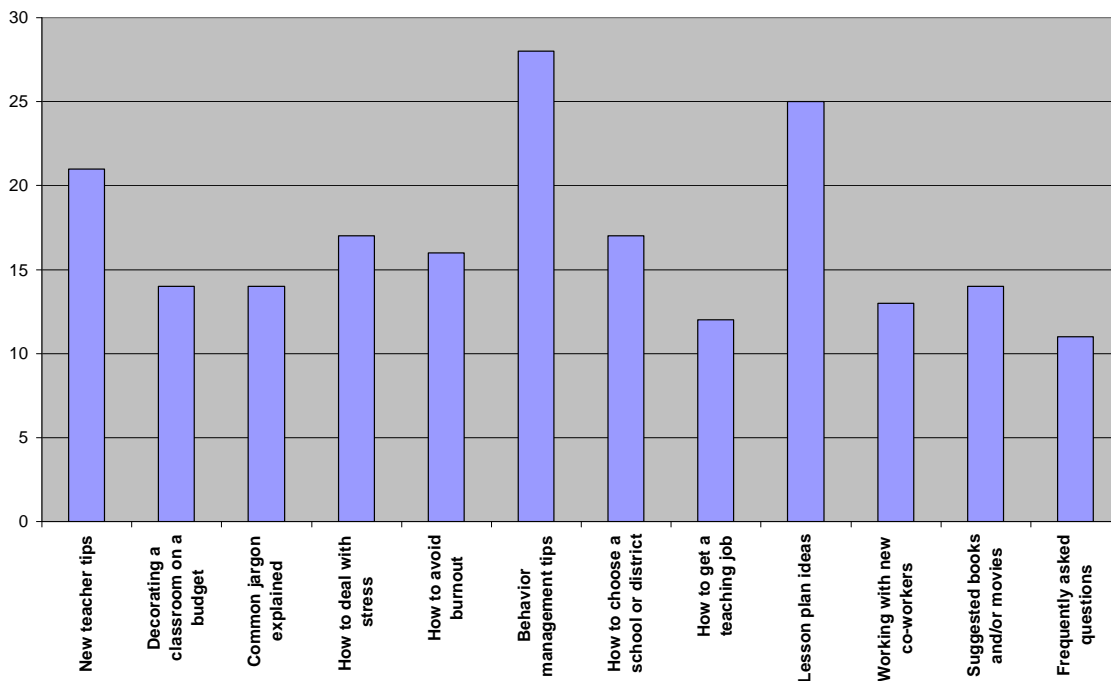
It is important to note that of the mentor teachers and student teachers surveyed, although 97% reported they already use teacher resource websites, 91% said they would like to see another website on other helpful topics. The thirty respondents that answered “yes” were directed to then select from a list of

topics they would be interested in seeing on a new website. The list included: new teacher tips, decorating a classroom on a budget, common jargon explained, how to deal with stress, how to avoid burnout, behavior management tips, how to choose a school or district, how to get a teaching job, lesson plan ideas, working with new co-workers, suggested books and/or movies, and frequently asked questions. All of the topics were selected by at least 31% of respondents. The most popular topics were “behavior management tips” (84%), “lesson plan ideas” (81%), “new teacher tips” (72%), and “suggested books and/or movies”

(66%). When given an opportunity to suggest other topics or ideas, one respondent wrote, “All of the topics would be helpful. Some more than others, and some would require a specific situation before I would think about looking the topic up. (i.e. If I were having behavior problems with a certain child and nothing was working, I might search for behavior management tips.)” Other suggestions were, “field trip places” and “teacher supply exchange – what is worth your money and what is not – also a part for teachers who are leaving the profession to dump all their old stuff.”

Graph 1

The topics STUDENT TEACHERS believe would be most helpful to new teachers



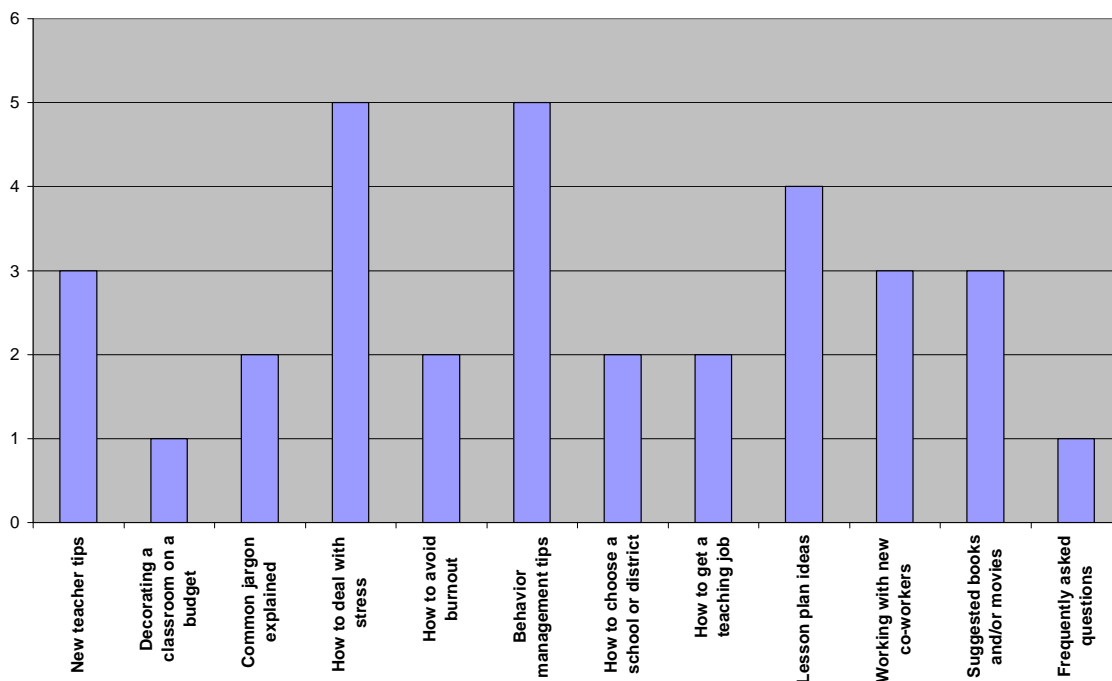
When provided with the same list of topics, but asked which they thought would be most helpful to *new* teachers, the results varied slightly. The respondents were discriminating in their choices instead of simply selecting all of the topics. Each topic was selected by no less than 40% of respondents except for “frequently asked questions” which was selected by only 34% of respondents. The most popular selection was “behavior management tips” at 94%. This was followed by “lesson plan ideas” at 83%, “new teacher tips” at 69%, “how to deal with stress” at 78%, and “suggested books and/or movies” at 63%. The least selected topic was “frequently asked questions”. It is speculated that those surveyed may have assumed the questions would be about the website rather than common questions about teaching. This is

inconclusive. When given the opportunity to suggest alternative or additional topic ideas, one respondent suggested “what to expect on the first day” which is very useful information for new teachers.

When examining the responses of only the student teachers, who are scheduled to become new teachers in the upcoming school year, the responses were markedly different (refer to Graph 1). Student teachers believed “behavior management” was the main area (97%) in which they needed advice. The remaining topics, in order of importance to the student teachers were: lesson plan ideas, new teacher tips, how to choose a school or district, how to deal with stress, and how to avoid burnout. All other topics were chosen by fewer than 50% of the student teachers.

Graph 2

The topics EXPERIENCED TEACHERS believe would be most helpful to new teachers



Experienced teachers answered knowing what it was like when they were a new teacher (refer to Graph 2). With that in mind, they chose both “behavior management tips” and “how to deal with stress” as their top choices (83% for each). “Lesson plan ideas” was the only other topic that was chosen by more than 50% of the teachers (67%). Three other topics received exactly 50% ratings: new teacher tips, working with new co-workers, and suggested books and/or movies. It is clear that experienced teachers looking back on their early years feel they could have used slightly different help than what future teachers believe they will need in their early years. The area in which all respondents agreed was the most important was “behavior management tips”. “Lesson plan ideas” were given a lower priority by experienced teachers when compared to student teachers. This is likely due to the fact that the experienced teachers have had years to build up their arsenal of lessons and ideas and no longer struggle to plan each day. For new teachers, however, this is a major concern.

An interesting conclusion to the needs assessment was to ask if the respondents would contribute to a new resource website intended to help new teachers. Twenty-two of the respondents said they would contribute. Eight of the respondents said they would not contribute, and five respondents said they would contribute to the web site if they had time or if they “knew of any that was different from what was already given.” One respondent also commented they would contribute to the site if, “it was easy and not too time consuming.”

Following that, they were asked if they would use a new resource website intended to help new teachers. Thirty of

the respondents said yes. Twenty-seven of the thirty were student teachers. The other two student teachers responded by saying I would if, “I have time” and “It would depend on how the information was distributed on the website. I may read something if it were a short article that grabbed my attention. It would also depend on how easily and quickly I could find the information on the website.”

Intervention

Based on these results and the previous research detailed above, there is a clear need for an intervention to help new teachers. As researchers, there is minimal control over individual reflection, principal and/or peer support, or induction programs. To provide immediate support to new teachers, a website has been created that is a concise resource for new teachers and will offer help in all areas mentioned in the needs assessment. This web site is NewTeacherSurvivalGuide.com. It includes all of the topics listed in the survey: new teacher tips, decorating a classroom on a budget, common jargon explained, how to deal with stress, how to avoid burnout, behavior management tips, how to choose a school or district, how to get a teaching job, lesson plan ideas, working with new co-workers, suggested books and/or movies, frequently asked questions, and what to expect on the first day.

Each topic on the website has been researched so that the best and most helpful information can be provided to new teachers. It is also encouraged that any teachers using the website make their own contributions to the content by sharing tips, lesson ideas, anecdotes, any other information they

believe would be beneficial. The respondents of the original needs assessment will be notified of the new website that was created based on their opinions. It will also be advertised to pre-service teacher training programs so that future teachers will have this website as a tool for when they begin their new career.

NewTeacherSurvivalGuide.com is simple, easy to navigate, and well

organized so that new, busy teachers can find the information they need quickly and easily. This will be a very helpful tool to those that are entering the profession and will hopefully lead to better success for these new teachers. In the situation in which individual reflection is not yet learned, induction programs are not provided, and principal and/or peer support is nonexistent, this website will be a virtual mentor.

New Teacher Survival Guide
info@newteachersurvivalguide.com

HOME ABOUT US CONTACT US QUESTIONS

Welcome to NewTeacherSurvivalGuide.com! On this website, you will find information to help you not only survive, but *thrive* in your new career. Enjoy tips from more experienced teachers, search ideas for lesson plans, read questions from other new teachers and know that *you are not alone*. We are here to support you and help you do a *great job* in your *new job*!

New Teacher Q's

- How to decorate your classroom on a budget
- How to choose a school or district
- How to get a job
- Common jargon explained
- How to avoid burnout
- Working with new co-workers
- And much more...

Content Areas

- Mathematics
- Language Arts
- Science
- Social Studies
- Electives
- Athletics
- And much more...

Teacher Tips

- Great deals on classroom decorations and supplies
- Success stories
- Helpful websites
- And much more...

Contribute

- Lesson plan ideas
- Questions
- Suggestions
- Job postings
- And much more...

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Future Research

This new website, however, is not able to solve all of the issues that exist for new teachers. More research should be done on additional ways to help the many new and somewhat unprepared employees as they embark on this life changing career. Also, more research should be conducted on the role of the Internet and other websites that offer support to teachers. In the New Teacher Resource Survey, 97% of respondents stated they use teacher

resource websites. Clearly, the Internet is a major tool in today's classroom and should be studied so that it can be maximized to the benefit of all teachers.

Taryn VanderPyl is a graduate student at the Arizona State University College of Teacher Education and Leadership in the Masters of Special Education and Certification program. She is currently student teaching and is scheduled to graduate Spring 2007. After graduation, Ms. VanderPyl aspires to teach Mathematics to high school students receiving Special Education services.

APPENDIX A

New Teacher Resource Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey! It is very brief and should take NO MORE THAN 5 MINUTES TO COMPLETE. This survey is part of my Applied Project that I am completing for my master's degree from Arizona State University College of Teacher Education and Leadership.

The purpose of this survey is to create a resource for new teachers that will help them not only survive, but actually thrive in their new jobs. I appreciate your feedback as you are clearly the experts! New teachers will benefit from the responses you provide to this survey.

Your information is completely confidential. It will be aggregated into a statistical program and analyzed.

Please submit your response by March 21st, 2007.

Thank you again for your time and participation!

Please select the appropriate range for your age.

- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65-69
- 70+

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

How many years have you been teaching?

- 0-1
- 1-2
- 2-3
- 3-4
- 4-5

- 5-7
- 7-10
- 10-15
- 15-20
- 20+

In what type of school do you currently teach?

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- Junior High School
- High School
- Other (please specify)

Do you have access to the Internet?

- Yes, at home.
- Yes, in my classroom.
- Yes, at home and in my classroom.
- No, I do not have any convenient access to the Internet.

How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet?

- 0
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-15
- 15-20
- 20-25
- 25-30
- 30+

How comfortable do you feel using the Internet?

- Very comfortable
- Mostly comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Not very comfortable
- Not comfortable

Do you use any teacher resource websites?

- Yes
- No

If so, which ones? (Please select all you have used at least one time.)

- EducationWorld.com
- BusyTeachersCafe.com
- TheTeachersCorner.net
- LessonPlansPage.com
- AtoZTeacherStuff.com

- SitesForTeachers.com
- SchoolExpress.com
- ABCTeach.com
- TeacherPlanet.com
- LearningPage.com
- Just4Teachers.com
- Other Site: _____

Would you like to see a website on other topics?

- Yes
- No

If so, which topics? (Please select all you believe would be helpful to you.)

- New teacher tips
- Decorating a classroom on a budget
- Common jargon explained
- How to deal with stress
- How to avoid burnout
- Behavior management tips
- How to choose a school or district
- How to get a teaching job
- Lesson plan ideas
- Working with new co-workers
- Suggested books and/or movies
- Frequently asked questions
- Other: _____

What topics do you believe would be most helpful for new teachers?

- New teacher tips
- Decorating a classroom on a budget
- Common jargon explained
- How to deal with stress
- How to avoid burnout
- Behavior management tips
- How to choose a school or district
- How to get a teaching job
- Lesson plan ideas
- Working with new co-workers
- Suggested books and/or movies
- Frequently asked questions
- Other: _____

Would you contribute to a new resource website intended to help new teachers?

- Yes
- No
- I would if:

Would you use a new resource website intended to help new teachers?

- Yes
- No
- I would if:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=382243375165>

APPENDIX B

Table of Previous Research

Article	Researchers	Study	Results
Learning to Become a Learning Professional: Reflections on One Year of Teaching	Karl Attard and Kathleen M. Armour (2005)	Karl Attard kept a reflective journal on his first year of teaching and compared it to research he had done on the power of being a reflective professional.	Attard and Armour determined that part of pre-service training for new teachers should include learning how to reflect and learn from their own experiences.
Wishful Thinking or a Bag of Tricks? Helping the Beginning Special Educator	Christopher Blake and Elizabeth C. Monahan (2006)	Blake and Monahan used an “action research” study in which graduate interns observed their mentors in the classrooms and made note of the classroom itself as well as the activities of both the students and the teacher.	They assert that teachers must be carefully trained in the use of “meta-cognitive tools of reflection ” to understand the individualized manner of “the students’ learning and the corresponding pedagogical instincts and practices” that will lead to success for both the teacher and the students (p. 19).
Quality Induction: An Investment in Teachers	Ellen Moir and Janet Gless (2001)	Moir and Gless look at the teacher shortage as caused by attrition and discuss how to increase retention by providing better training and support for beginning teachers. <i>No study was conducted.</i>	“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 ” (p. 110-111).
Helping New Teachers Enter and Stay in the Profession	Margaret Olebe (2005)	Olebe looks at her own experience in teaching and suggests changes to help teachers be more successful in their early years in the profession. <i>No study was conducted.</i>	Olebe believes the key ingredients to a successful induction program include: individualized teacher support such as mentoring, professional development activities, and employer-sponsored programs and workshops.

The Struggles of First-Year Teachers: Investigating Support Mechanisms	Robert J. Quinn and Byllie D'Amato Andrews (2004)	Quinn and Andrews surveyed first-year teachers in a single school district. They asked them to rank their needs in order of importance from a list of 6 possibilities: assistance with instruction and curriculum, personal and/or emotional support, access to materials, supplies, and resources, information about school and school district procedures and policies, help with classroom management and discipline, and suggestions for dealing with parents or parent conferences.	They determined that principals are the most important factor for new teachers. "Principals who support their first-year teachers have staffs that are also supportive of those teachers" (p. 167) Principals are the catalyst for the level of overall support the new teachers felt they had and, therefore, must be taught how to provide the best support for their new employees.
The Importance of Principals: Site Administrators' Roles in Novice Teacher Induction	Ann L. Wood (2005)	Wood studies principals and their role in teacher induction. Principals were surveyed on a Likert-scale questionnaire. Site induction coordinators, teachers, and principals also were all interviewed for qualitative data.	The conclusion Wood reached is that more research as to the role of principals in the induction of novice teachers should be conducted. She did, however, conclude that their role is significant and not to be understated.
Anatomy of Success and Failure: The Story of Three Novice Teachers	Eitan Eldar, Noa Nabel, Chen Schechter, Rachel Talmor, and Karina Mazin (2003)	Eldar et al. followed three new teachers through their first year in the profession. They interview the teachers regarding their difficulties and support mechanisms.	Of the three teachers, one was very successful, one struggled and survived to try another year, and the third suffered such that she chose to leave the profession. They examined the lessons to be learned from each of these individuals and their experiences – what they could have done better, how to handle situations, etc. They determine what support systems each of these teachers needed that did or would have led to their success. The important factors turned out to be reception at the school, involvement with the principal and other teachers, relationship with students, and personal attitude toward the work.

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