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The Induction and Mentorship of New Practitioners in Early Childhood Education Centres: The South African Context

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to emphasise the value of inducting and mentoring new practitioners in Early Childhood Education centres. Early Childhood Education centres are usually located in meaningful buildings. Centres care for more children than the family can provide for. They are usually divided into groups or classrooms of similarly aged children. Child care centres typically have many practitioners who are overseen by a centre manager or a director. Induction and mentoring are components of professional development aimed at enhancing the educational support system for all ECEC practitioners, particularly those who have recently been hired. Because centre managers are responsible for the growth and performance of their children, they should equip practitioners with support measures to help them improve child development and performance. Because most mothers work full-time, usually out of financial necessity, they require regular child care. For these mothers the question is not whether to use day-care, but how to choose among the available options in a way that is best for the child. Quality child care is more beneficial to children than staying at home. As a result, the purpose of this study is to look at conceptual frameworks as well as new approaches of educating and supporting practitioners to facilitate ECE learning excellence. More experienced personnel (mentors) should provide induction and mentorship, guidance, advice, and information to practitioners for career growth and enhanced performance. Findings reveal that induction and mentorship are important to pass along information, skills, and competence to practitioners who may not have had official training in these areas. Based on the appropriateness or inadequacy of the design of practitioner induction and mentoring programs, more study on the influence of induction on performance and practitioner turnover may be conducted (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Transformation and practitioner retention should be the goals of induction and mentorship.

Keywords: induction, mentoring, beginner practitioners, professional development, ECE centres, transformation

Introduction

ECE teachers need induction and mentorship to develop their abilities. The ECE environment requires competence and qualifications to close the practitioner induction and mentorship gap. Daytime working parents can leave their kids with ECE staff at day-cares also called nurseries, preschools, or crèches. Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs for ages 0–4 and 5–6 are available for Grade R learners (Moletsane & Adams-Ojugbele, 2019). The skills and information gained via teacher education and experience may not apply to new situations. ECE centres must be committed to centre dynamics and mindful of societal demands to succeed (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). The mentor must

learn the mentee's background, needs, societal conventions, and aspirations. The mentor's expertise should help the mentee or practitioner connect ECE practices to the centre's aims. Mentors must consider both the mentee's and the centre's interests while prioritising. The centre management must provide continual professional development for all ECE practitioners, including newcomers. ECE centres often supervise many practitioners. Program-based professional development called induction lists all the actions practitioners should accomplish and how they might help their students. This resource is ongoing and systemic for ECE professionals. Professional mentoring and psychological support can assist new practitioners build job-related skills and feel competent and effective in interactions (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). The induction process and mentoring relationship increase the protégé's skills. The principles of induction and mentorship encompass all approaches to educating and advancing practitioners. Mentors help non-trained practitioners improve ECE centre practises and their requirements.

Inducting and mentoring practitioners

Induction includes formal and informal professional and social growth (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014). Thornton and Cherrington (2019) define induction as a school or centre helping new staff members adjust without disturbing the workplace. New practitioners are often mentored or partnered with established practitioners. I think cheerful, caring, and uplifting induction should be dealt with apart from assessment. Mentors assist new practitioners acclimate by providing continuing support. How new practitioners are introduced into the field affects what they bring and how they manage challenges. Effective induction requires regular practitioner review throughout the high-quality mentoring process and organised professional development planning time with practitioners (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). The inducted and mentored practitioners must reinforce the successes and resolve the concerns to view this as a constructive exercise for the centre's pedagogical goals. According to Langdon et al. (2016), mentoring should benefit practitioners and reduce incompetence, especially among newly recruited government personnel. Some practitioners feel disheartened and depart because their centre managers undervalue their excellent intentions and classroom experiments. General consensus exists that ECE induction programs for new practitioners should take local factors into account. To achieve teaching excellence and the new ECE standards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010), practitioners need criteria for teacher preparation, classroom performance, and student achievement, as well as continued and focused professional development. Leadership in education is crucial to helping new teachers move from classroom theory to practice.

Importance of induction within the SA context

Newly appointed practitioners have specific expectations when it comes to being trained. Managers and principals have a responsibility to help their employees set and meet reasonable professional goals. Disorientation and feelings of inadequacy are common among novice practitioners because of unclear or confused expectations from centre managers/principals, children, parents, and fellow employees (Akdağ, 2014). It might be difficult to ease newly certified professionals into the work and culture of a new

centre. Having a positive induction strategy that trains and supports new practitioners is the greatest way to support and develop them. Without an appropriate induction programme to direct, introduce, and initiate them, new practitioners will not be able to perform to their full potential or accomplish the goals of the centre that hired them. They require orientation and support as they become acquainted with the centre's operations, their assigned tasks, and the other staff members and students with whom they will be working. Goals for instruction and assessment should be established as early as possible in the induction process.

Researchers have different perspectives on what staff induction actually is; some regard it as a process where novices are helped to show competence, while others see it as an extension of professional preparation for teaching (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). Managers and principals should create an orientation program to educate newly hired practitioners on crucial aspects of their new work setting. Having the manager/principal or an experienced staff member give an introduction helps newcomers feel more at ease about details related to their responsibilities, ECE guidelines, and the centre's overarching goals and objectives.

Tours that introduce new employees to their surroundings, as well as their co-workers and other those involved, are an important part of the socialisation process. Induction programs ought to stress encouragement, the realisation of intended outcomes, and increased personal responsibility. Lessons during induction should be stimulating in order to encourage critical interaction with peers and the mentor. Students/mentees should be ready to engage in independent, introspective learning. The success of the project is highly dependent on the dedication and hard work of the participants.

Professional development and training through mentoring

ECE leaders establish strategic priorities for their centres. Building educational facilities needs their talents. New trends include induction and mentorship initiatives to improve educators (Clutterbuck, 2011). Thus, face-to-face interaction between experienced and new practitioners is crucial for support and development. Experienced mentors can help new teachers with classroom observation, formative evaluations, feedback, and advice (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). Mentoring involves being a positive role model and resource for a protégé. A mentor is an experienced expert who advises a less-skilled colleague. advise and guide mentees to career advancement. Mentors help mentees reflect on and learn from their own and others' experiences.

Mentoring programs should be available to all ECE professionals to help them develop the skills needed to teach and learn in ECE settings and identify where educators need more training or resources. If they are not properly trained or mentored before joining the field, practitioners may struggle in the classroom. They must work hard to establish their new talents during this transition due to new demands. Direction and encouragement are needed to gain confidence and skill. Mentoring for PTD emphasizes a well-established procedure that includes all official and informal teacher career advancement activities. Seminars, and in-centre collaborative learning offer mentoring and best practices exchange. Informal training includes reading, conversations, peer learning, and observing colleagues (Mizell, 2010). External expertise from courses, workshops, or formal qualification programmes and collaboration between ECE centres or practitioners (such as observational visits to other centres) can all contribute to mentoring and coaching as part of professional teacher development. Dedicated training

facilities, teacher networks, or ECE facilities where practitioners work can provide formal education (OECD, 2009).

Many teachers/practitioners professional development approaches fail to address learning goals (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018), despite PTD being vital for practically every educational attempt to improve teaching and learning. Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004) say training works best when integrated into everyday work. Professional development can improve instruction and student performance. If ECE centres want children to succeed, they must work hard to improve their practitioners. Educational facility managers must encourage team planning and collaborative learning to improve classroom instruction (OECD, 2009). Such assistance may inspire instructors to improve classroom performance and student outcomes. Supervisors require interpersonal competency, social awareness, and social abilities (Akdağ, 2014). Most South African practitioners lack mentorship and coaching for professional development. Departments and school districts worldwide spend thousands on in-service training seminars but far less on practitioner mentoring and coaching. To improve ECE expertise and classroom instruction, educators and policymakers worldwide propose additional professional development and support for practitioners (Akdağ, 2014).

Research methodology

Early Childhood Care and Education facilities in Black settlement areas of Gauteng Province were studied using a qualitative research strategy. The study aimed to shed light on the challenges, knowledge, practices, and support afforded to new practitioners in ECE centres in the South African context through induction and mentoring because of the limited research on this topic.

In order to collect information, five centre managers were questioned face-to-face employing semi-structured interviews. To teach and support newly appointed practitioners for learning excellence, conceptual and theoretical induction frameworks were studied. First few years of teaching are considered the practitioner induction period which bridges the gap between pre-service training and ongoing professional growth (Barrett, Zhukov & Welch, 2019). As part of the center's induction procedure, new practitioners were formally introduced to their new duties as teachers. Competing with more seasoned professionals, learning the ins and outs of the prevailing centre culture, and gaining the respect of peers are all common challenges for new practitioners. Data was examined thematically to extract overarching themes and underlying concepts (Owens-Cunningham, 2021).

The results showed that the growth of professionals working in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres is hampered by a lack of training and assistance through induction and mentorship. The takeaway is that most managers rely on practitioners who are neither well-trained nor well-compensated to run the day-to-day business of the centre. Well-trained, informed, visionary, experienced managers/mentors and practitioners are required for sustainable development in ECCE centre induction and mentoring. It is recommended that programs be designed to help practitioners improve the teaching performance of new practitioners and increase their capacity for growth and learning. Centre administrators, policymakers, and others interested in the topic may find the report informative.

Theoretical framework

Teacher Development Theory was used to explore how new ECE practitioners adapt. The idea recognises the complexity of education and the fact that ECE centre teacher preparation rarely provides all the knowledge and skills needed for centre success. Work experience is essential for learning (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010). Thus, the centre's manager/principal must promote skill development and professional advancement. Teacher development emphasises learning, training, and lifelong learning. Learning new skills and knowledge at work is crucial. Formal or informal learning gives practitioners the skills and habits to succeed. Lifelong learning becomes inseparable from employment when education is integrated into the workplace. Training is distinct as an economic input. People can seek education and training for motives other than money because economic incentives are weak. People solve problems themselves, and education from early infancy to retirement helps them adapt to a knowledge-based society and values all forms of education (Soni, 2012).

Both formal and informal education and training are considered "lifelong learning", and involve acquiring attitudes, beliefs, skills, and knowledge via daily experience and educational influences and resources (Soni, 2012). Formal education includes kindergarten through college and school-like technical and professional training programs. Lifelong learning in the home, business, and society promotes effective educational opportunities. Professional work involves ongoing learning and development, not a linear progression through education. Education occurs across the lifespan, in almost every field, and increasingly in official and informal multi-person situations. These cases must inform more comprehensive learning theories and cutting-edge approaches, procedures, and assessments for teachers. A lifetime learning method that combines formal education with informal learning at home, in the community, and at work can improve teaching quality (Soni, 2012).

The role of the mentor and mentee

A mentor is someone who has achieved mastery in her field and is widely regarded as an authority in her field. A mentor's job is to help their mentee grow professionally, whether that means helping them go from novice to expert or from expert to leader in their field. Mentors are expected to help their mentees grow in ways that directly address their specific areas of weakness (Clutterbuck, 2011). The mentor's primary responsibility is to inspire their mentees to engage in the mentoring process and think critically about their experiences. The mentor's expertise enables them to employ a variety of instructional approaches and pertinent resources in order to guide their mentee toward achieving their objectives. Success in a mentoring relationship depends not only on the mentor's dedication, knowledge, and personality, but also on the mentee's willingness to put in the time and effort required to learn from and grow with their mentor. The mentee must view the mentoring relationship as a privilege and not an entitlement and must view the mentoring process as a chance for professional growth and development. The mentor, not the mentee, is the one who takes the lead in a mentoring relationship and ensures that the mentee learns from it. In order to get the most out of mentoring, the mentee must have a genuine interest in developing themselves.

The mentoring and coaching principles acknowledge that there is considerable variation in the applications of mentoring and coaching (Clutterbuck, 2011). Training for

mentorship and coaching should be tailored to the specific settings in which its participants will be working. The mentorship and coaching program should be set up in such a way that participants may talk to one another about their experiences in the classroom and the difficulties they have had putting into words the values they already hold. The mentor's job is to foster an atmosphere conducive to learning by encouraging an open dialogue and acknowledging the value of each trainee's input. When there is mutual regard, everyone feels safe to speak their minds and express their opinions without fear of repercussion.

The bond formed will encourage co-workers to continue their dedication to education, which in turn will increase their proficiency in their respective fields. All mentees will develop the skills, knowledge, and self-awareness to take charge of their own professional progress as a result of the mentoring relationship. The mentees can see where they excel and where they need improvement in the development plan. The new practice and its adaption to diverse learning contexts can be better understood with the help of the identified strengths and shortcomings. Learning from mentors is acknowledged when new methods and techniques are put into practice. Risk-taking and creativity are fostered, and practitioners are prompted to seek out direct proof of practice, when mentoring and coaching skills are incorporated into the classroom setting. The ability to effectively use resources to safeguard and maintain daily learning, action, and contemplation is a direct result of the innovation fostered by consistent practice.

Implications of induction for practitioners

Teachers have different needs since they have different backgrounds and levels of experience. Although experienced practitioners may already know everything their students require, they still need formal training, especially new practitioners because they struggle with issues related to supervision. To help practitioners start quickly, educational leaders should undertake detailed staff assessments before establishing induction and mentorship programs (Akdağ, 2014). Curriculum changes, instructional approaches, technological advances, regulatory shifts, and student needs present distinct challenges to all practitioners undergoing induction and mentoring (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Because of this, becoming a practitioner is not proof of skills acquisition. Any new role requires a commitment to learn and improve, so practitioners should take advantage of introductory CPD to improve their abilities (Clutterbuck, 2011). Good practitioners can develop through professional development and improve their current position. Learning new skills helps professionals brainstorm workplace stress-reduction strategies. Strong interpersonal ties and open communication foster teamwork, good morale, and constant performance (Akdağ, 2014).

Induction session comments can provide new knowledge, professional growth and how to overcome hurdles. In environments that regularly mentor and induct, mentors improve personally and professionally, increase the mentee's subject knowledge, pedagogical, classroom management, and leadership skills. Improved reflective practice and independent study help them impact children's lives. Mentees gain self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and emotional, mental, and physical resilience when facing changes or adversity. Certified teachers help them more (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2016).

Conclusion

Practitioners and learners make ECE centres successful, thus induction and mentorship are vital. Effective ECE programs recruit and retain experienced teachers, train them to improve, and ensure all children receive a quality education. Managers who seek better classroom performance should induct and mentor practitioners. To attain this goal, staff must be able to understand best practices and encourage practitioners to engage in continuous improvement activities like research.

The most crucial questions are "What have they learned during induction?" and "What has this experience taught them about themselves?". Induction and mentorship sound good, but centres may implement them differently. Managers of large preschool centres may not be able to provide in-depth, hands-on mentoring and curriculum development with their staff due to access to quality training for prospective and current practitioners, a mismatch between supply and demand for certain practitioners, the system's inability to dramatically improve ECE centre teaching and learning, and a disjointed and uncoordinated system.

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