

## Understanding Quality Teacher Induction

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### **Abstract**

*Beginning teachers need high-quality induction supports to transition successfully into the teaching profession. The last three decades have seen the evolution of comprehensive induction programs to meet the support needs of teachers in their first three years of teaching as they take on ever varied roles in the school system. Central to an effective induction program, and ultimately the strengthening of beginning teacher teaching and student learning, are the identification and training of appropriate educative mentors, effective professional development plans, targeted feedback to the beginning teachers, and a supportive school culture.*

As new entrants in the teaching profession, beginning teachers require high-quality induction programs to transition successfully from pre-service to in-service teaching. Acknowledging the importance of induction for beginning teachers, schools, school districts, and school systems have worked to develop induction programs that will provide beginning teachers with the support they need to be successful. Although all beginning teachers bring their own personal strengths and needs to the teaching profession, and require specific, individualized, supports, there are also some consistencies in the induction programs offered. The key to high-quality induction is an understanding of the induction frameworks, the provision of ongoing educative support at the school level during the first three years of teaching, the selection and training of appropriate educative mentors, the need for developmentally appropriate professional development, planned formative assessment of each beginning teacher, and supportive school administration. It is important to understand that quality beginning teacher induction combines these features into a program that supports beginning teachers to help them become successful classroom teachers, thus strengthening their teaching and student learning.

### **Trends**

The definition of quality beginning teacher induction has changed markedly over the last thirty years, resulting from an increased understanding of teacher development by school system administrators (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Early induction programs for beginning teachers focused on informal one-to-one mentoring, whereas the most recent, high-quality induction programs are characterized by a comprehensive system of organized, educative mentor assistance, professional development, and formative assessment of beginning teachers in their first three years of teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2004). In addition to officially planned induction during the first three years of teaching, quality induction programs link teacher preparation and practice, which supports the distinct learning needs of beginning teachers, before, and during their transition into the teaching profession (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). For example, induction programs are gradually expanding to provide structured support to beginning teachers before the beginning teachers take up their first teaching position, especially when beginning teachers already know the school and grade-level at which they will be teaching (Paris, 2010). Defining the nature of quality induction programs, and the important role they play in the successful integration of beginning teachers into the teaching profession, has resulted in specific, focused support for these teachers, and is tailored to each teacher's distinct learning needs.

## Frameworks

Irrespective of the wide variety of schools and teaching assignments that beginning teachers experience, which play a significant part in determining their induction support needs, there are key frameworks that influence the way an induction program is designed. Firstly, induction is often considered a transitional phase in teacher development between pre-service and in-service professional development during which beginning teachers are evolving from students of teaching to teachers of students (Carver & Yusko, 1999). Thus, one component of a comprehensive induction program involves a guidance plan for beginning teachers during their transition to teaching emphasizing activities such as setting up the classroom or implementing classroom management routines. These are typically the immediate concerns of beginning teachers at the beginning of their careers.

A second framework considers induction as a socialization process in which beginning teachers acclimatize to the school and divisional culture, whereby powerful cultural norms often persuade beginning teachers to adapt to the status quo of schooling (Patterson, 2005). Induction focused on socialization stresses the development of skills that help beginning teachers feel like they fit into the culture of the school or division (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Socialization induction programs highlight school and divisional policies and procedures, teaching expectations, standards, commonalities, such as curricular materials to be used, and the amount of homework to be done per night. These programs are conducted through an orientation process that emphasizes beginning teacher acclimatization to the school or divisional climate (Winstead Fry, 2009). Thus, these programs often involve meetings to discuss the school expectations and culture, with the expectation that beginning teachers will adapt to become part of the staff, and school, environment.

A third framework of induction is the provision of intensive support, professional development and formative assessment for beginning teachers (AEE, 2004). This view of induction concentrates on developing beginning teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills over time, and places a heavy reliance on a substantive mentorship process (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). This support is provided over a longer term, and is based on reflective discussion, questioning, modelling, and feedback between beginning teachers and their educative mentor. Although very helpful in isolation, these three frameworks each contain critical elements of a successful induction program, which are all necessary for an effective induction process at the school level.

## Mentors

Providing this ongoing education and support for beginning teachers is required at the school level since it is not possible to cover all of the issues and topics that beginning teachers encounter on the job during an orientation or socialization induction process (Bartell, 2005). In a school setting, this ongoing support is most commonly provided by educative mentors, who interact with beginning teachers in ways that help them learn in, and from, their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Individuals who take on the role of educative mentors commonly have personal attributes that allow them to interact comfortably with beginning teachers, conduct formative assessment observations, reflect with the beginning teachers on their strengths and areas for future growth, and have the team skills to co-plan and co-teach to strengthen each beginning teacher's instruction and classroom environment (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). Accordingly, the selection of appropriate educative mentors is a critical component of a quality induction program.

Appropriate educative mentor candidates demonstrate quality instructional practice in their own classroom, reflective approaches to their own teaching, content knowledge and expert subject-based pedagogy, the commitment to ongoing personal and professional growth, excellent interpersonal skills, and empathy to the needs of beginning teachers (Wood &

Stanulis, 2009). Furthermore, it is ideal that educative mentors be matched to beginning teachers according to school size, grade level, and subject (Bartell 2005). The selection of appropriate educative mentors is critical in providing ongoing professional education and support for beginning teachers. Additionally, educative mentors need professional development themselves, in order to maximise their effectiveness in the mentorship role.

Training and professional development for educative mentors before, and during, the induction program, helps the mentors develop the skills necessary to help beginning teachers improve their practices. Gaining competence in understanding beginning teachers' needs, participating in mentorship simulations, and working with other mentors to share and learn, helps educative mentors develop their own sense of confidence and efficacy in their ability to support beginning teachers (Schwille & Dynak, 2000). This development of educative mentors' skills helps beginning teachers cope with their responsibilities and roles as teachers, and helps them to learn how to teach in ways that promote the successful engagement and learning of all of their learners (New Zealand Teachers Council, n.d.). Thus, mentor preparation is an important factor influencing beginning teachers' classroom practices.

### **Professional Development**

In addition to educative mentor training, developmentally appropriate professional development for beginning teachers, which to be effective has as its core goal the notion that participation in professional development activities improves teaching practices, is a requirement for quality beginning teacher induction (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Quality induction programs deliver this professional development in many ways, but all focus on deepening beginning teachers' content knowledge, classroom management skills, and ability to establish and maintain good relationships with students and their families (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Professional development must offer beginning teachers the opportunity to focus on critical problems of practice that are school based, and embedded in teacher work, and, when provided often enough and long enough, ensures progressive gain in knowledge, skills, and confidence (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Additionally, professional development provides an opportunity for interaction between the mentors and beginning teachers focused on questions, research-based inquiry, and reflections of new understandings of subject matter, students, and teaching and learning, which emphasize learning as the centre of teaching, for both teachers and students (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Thus, effective induction requires that developmentally appropriate professional development be strategically planned, in order to focus on improving student learning through improving teacher performance, and encouraging authentic collaborative learning between the mentors and the beginning teachers.

### **Formative Assessment**

During this collaborative process, formative assessment needs to be provided to beginning teachers, with the goal of improving teaching practices. Frequent observations, mentor feedback, and reflective questioning by the mentor teachers are all part of a series of structured formative assessment activities carried out by the mentors and beginning teachers, whereby the beginning teachers learn how to self-assess their professional competence (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). In turn, beginning teachers are able to become more professionally self-sufficient, to feel more competent, and to be more confident about the quality of education that they are providing to students in their classrooms (Winstead Fry, 2009). Increasing these traits in beginning teachers frequently leads to enhanced job performance and satisfaction, resulting in better student learning and higher rates of teacher retention. Consequently, a quality induction program must include ongoing, planned formative assessments, which provide beginning teachers with the chance to learn about, and improve, their practices over time.

## Role of Administration

Administrators, especially principals, play vital roles in providing beginning teachers with opportunities to learn about, and improve, their teaching practices (AEE, 2004). Although most beginning teachers cite their mentors as the most important people in their entry to teaching, many also cite having supportive principals as the most critical factor in their professional development (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Effective implementation of the induction components depends on the site administrator's leadership and commitment to induction (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). The role that principals play in quality induction is extensive and includes acting as facilitators of educative mentoring through approving and providing sanctioned time and resources for the induction program, advocating for beginning teachers by visiting their classrooms regularly, talking to them about their lessons, expressing an interest in their progress, and giving them advice on how to avoid teacher burnout (Wood, 2005). Thus, supportive school administration is essential for high-quality induction programming, and for creating a school culture that welcomes, values, and supports beginning teachers.

Principals have key roles in building a supportive school culture for beginning teachers and often set the tone for how easy or difficult it is for beginning teachers to be accepted into the school's learning community. Supportive principals understand that beginning teachers placed in poor working conditions, with large classes, high numbers of students with learning or behavioural difficulties, insufficient classroom resources, and new assignments each year, are likely to fail (Patterson, 2005). Principals also have the responsibility to encourage shared definitions of knowledge, teaching, and learning, in order to establish a common language with which beginning teachers and mentors can discuss teaching and learning (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). Thus, administrators in high-quality induction programs must work to ensure that beginning teachers are treated fairly in the school environment, which promotes their development and learning.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential that beginning teachers receive high-quality induction to successfully transition into the teaching profession. Over the last thirty years, the definition of quality induction has evolved as schools, school divisions, and school systems have developed comprehensive systems of support for beginning teachers, based on the needs of each beginning teacher. The wide variety of roles that beginning teachers fill, requires that quality induction programs engage them in ongoing educative support over the first three years of teaching. Essential to this support is the selection and training of appropriate educative mentor teachers who will engage beginning teachers in developmentally appropriate professional development, and provide formative assessment of beginning teachers to strengthen their teaching and learning. In addition, supportive school administrators are needed to create a school environment that reinforces and validates a high-quality induction program. Therefore, to ensure that beginning teachers are successful in their first three years in the teaching profession, it is necessary to understand the components of induction, and to implement high-quality induction programs for all beginning teachers.

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