

# **First-Year Teachers and Induction Support: Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens**

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*Novice teachers often struggle during the transition from being students of teaching to teachers of students. Consequently, high attrition rates characterize the first 3 years of teaching, underscoring a need to provide better support for beginning teachers. This investigation sought to answer the following question: How are 1st-year teachers supported during induction and how do they respond to this support? Four 1st-year elementary teachers participated in a year-long case-study investigation. Primary form of data collection was monthly semi-structured phone interviews. Participants faced similar challenges, while adjusting to their new profession, but received varied, often inadequate, forms of support during their 1st year. The results suggest that rather than identifying the prevalence of induction support, future research should endeavor to assess program quality and guide educators in the provision of valuable induction for new teachers. Key Words: Induction, Beginning Teachers, and Case Study*

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## **Introduction to the Problem**

Educators have long known that, without quality teachers, the best curriculum, facilities, and resources do not matter (Bush, 1966). This knowledge, coupled with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's mandate requiring highly qualified teachers for every child in the United States (*No Child Left Behind*, 2002), underscores the value of effective induction support for beginning teachers. By definition, induction is the first 3 years of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and influences teaching behavior for an educator's entire career (Mager, 1992). It is also a period of difficult adjustment; as many as 29% of K-12 teachers leave the profession during the first 3 years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002). If highly qualified teachers are to remain in the profession and thrive, they must be supported during the challenging induction years. The present investigation chronicled the experiences of four 1st-year teachers who shared personal accounts of the challenges and successes they faced during their entry into the teaching profession through monthly interviews. This article presents an analysis of their experiences.

## **Literature Review**

Many new teachers adopt traditional teaching methods during their student teaching and early in-service years instead of utilizing the innovative ones they were exposed to in teacher preparation (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Veenman, 1984). This

tendency can result from interactions with experienced colleagues who deride innovative research-supported teaching methods (Clark, 1999). Survival plays a role as well; faced with seemingly insurmountable classroom management issues, beginners often adopt traditional teaching methods that keep students working quietly in their seats, and thus, are easier to control (Veenman). These factors led Feiman-Nemser to conclude, “‘sink or swim’ induction encourages novices to stick to whatever practices enable them to survive whether or not they represent ‘best’ practice in that situation” (p. 1014).

In contrast, well-designed induction programs can provide beginning teachers with support that helps them survive the classroom management challenges, seemingly endless curriculum and instruction questions, and feelings of isolation that contribute to the nationwide attrition problem. Well-established induction programs have successfully retained high percentages of beginning teachers. For example, studies of induction programs in Santa Cruz, California; Walla Walla, Washington; and southern Illinois reported retention rates that were greater than 90% over 6-, 5-, and 3-year time periods, respectively (Boss, 2001; Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Linik, 2001). Although these studies reported the successes of individual induction programs, the collective impact of induction programs may not be as significant. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) reported that nearly 80% of 1st-year teachers nationwide participated in some form of induction--an increase of approximately 40% from 10 years earlier. This increase in induction program participation does not seem to have correlated in reduced attrition rates, which remain near 29% for the first 3 years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002).

Attrition rates may have remained stable despite increased participation in induction programs because of variability in the type of support offered. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) analyzed the impact different forms and combinations of induction had on attrition using results from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a national study that includes data from approximately 52,000 elementary and secondary teachers. After controlling for differences in teacher and school characteristics, Smith and Ingersoll found the predicted attrition rate for beginning teachers receiving no form of induction support was 40%. They identified the following as the most common forms of induction support: mentoring, supportive communication from an administrator or department chair, common planning time with other teachers in the grade or content area, or seminars for beginning teachers. Receiving only one of these forms of induction support did not have a significant impact on the predicted attrition rate. A combination of mentoring and supportive communication from an administrator, which Smith and Ingersoll refer to as “basic induction,” produced a predicted attrition rate of 39%. The predicted attrition was reduced to 27% when beginning teachers had basic induction plus common planning time with other teachers in the grade or content area, and participated in seminars for beginning teachers. The lowest predicted attrition rate was 18%; this was achieved when beginners received the combinations described above plus one of the following: a teacher’s aide, reduced number of preparations, or participation in an external network of teachers. Smith and Ingersoll’s analysis suggests that the mere presence of induction programs is not enough to reduce attrition rates among beginning teachers; the form and quality of induction that schools provide is important.

Smith and Ingersoll’s (2004) research was based on a quantitative data set (SASS) that determines whether or not beginning teachers received specific forms of induction. SASS does not measure how useful these teachers found their induction experiences.

Since the presence of induction may not be enough to reduce attrition rates, research needs to move beyond determining the prevalence of induction and begin to assess form and quality. Interviewing beginning teachers about their experiences and the support they receive is a valuable way to assess the form and quality of induction in schools. Interviews provide evaluative data immediately so schools do not need to wait until the 3-year induction period is over to see whether or not beginning teachers become attrition statistics. The current investigation contributes to the induction literature by using qualitative research methods to determine how four 1st-year teachers were supported during induction and how they responded to this support.

## Methods

Before undertaking the research investigation, I obtained approval from my university's Institutional Review Board for the research design. The review process promoted ethical treatment of the human subjects who participated in this investigation. The sections that follow provide details about the participants, research framework, data collection and analysis, and credibility procedures.

### Participants

Four 1st-year teachers participated in this study: Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura (pseudonyms). The participants, all women, graduated with elementary education degrees from the same land-grant university located in the Rocky Mountain West. The university has approximately 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and approximately 120 elementary education majors graduate from the teacher preparation program each year. The participants were part of the same student teaching cohort, and were between 22 and 24 years old at the time of the study. Stella spent her first in-service year teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a town of approximately 7,000 people that was located less than 20 miles away from a large city. Shari taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in a community of fewer than 1,200 people, located approximately 2 ½ hours away from the nearest major city. Becca and Laura taught kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, respectively. Becca's school was in a suburban area of a large city. Laura taught in a town of fewer than 30,000 people, located 90 minutes from the nearest city. (All population data was obtained from U.S. Census, 2000.)

Participant involvement was requested based on involvement in an earlier, related study about the impact of an induction network they used during their student teaching experiences (Fry, 2006). Purposive sampling, a procedure that involves choosing participants with the qualities the researcher wants to investigate (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), was used to identify appropriate participants for the original study. During the original study, Stella, Becca, Shari, and Laura demonstrated writing and speaking strengths as well as strong reflective abilities that may have developed as a result of their teacher preparation program's emphasis on educators being reflective practitioners. Each was able to clearly explain the rationale for her teaching decisions, thoughtfully ask questions to help improve her practice, and explain her students' behavior and learning in detail. Because these skills contribute to rich qualitative data, Stella, Becca, Shari, and Laura were invited to participate in the present study. No monetary or tangible incentive was offered for participation.

## **Research Framework**

The researcher plays an integral role in qualitative research, serving as the “principal instrument” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20) for data collection and analysis. This role allows a qualitative researcher to “obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Toma (2000) explained that another benefit of qualitative research occurs when the researcher is subjective rather than objective as traditionally called for in research with human subjects. Subjectivity allows “researchers and subjects [to] collaborate to determine meaning, generate findings, and reach conclusions” (p. 177). Toma suggested such research partnerships generate good qualitative data because when researchers “care deeply about what and whom they are studying” (p. 177), they are more likely to become “insiders” (p. 183) who get to know and negotiate meaning about their research topic.

At the start of this study I already cared about the four participants. In addition to working with them during the earlier investigation of student teaching induction (Fry, 2006), when the participants were pre-service teachers, I was their professor and field supervisor. Through the experiences we shared, I developed personal relationships with each. I hoped they would be successful beginning teachers and cared about their personal well-being. In addition to undertaking new research about a timely topic, this investigation allowed me to continue to be supportive of these four young teachers long after the time when a university professor’s involvement in a beginning teacher’s career typically ends. My attachment to this research topic was not just limited to an interest in the research participants. I spent my 1st year teaching in a district with no induction, while my 2nd and 3rd years were spent in different district that provided an effective induction program. I was far more successful teaching in the district where I received induction support. Thus, I am predisposed to see induction as useful because of my own experiences.

Influenced by Toma’s (2000) guidelines, I designed this investigation as a person who was “genuinely interested in the subject--both in terms of the overall phenomenon and the people who can shed light on it” (p. 180). I have shared the nature of my interest, which is also a source of potential bias in this study. Accordingly, I also used a systematic research protocol for data collection and analysis to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This protocol, along with the relationship I had with the participants (Toma), was designed to reduce the impact of my bias on the investigation. Ultimately, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) aptly explained, “data ... provide a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study” (p. 34).

A case study research design was selected for this investigation. According to Yin (1994), case study is the proper research design when a phenomenon’s variables cannot be separated from its context. In the case of this study’s participants, there was no way to separate their response to their induction support from the context of their teaching positions, relationships with their colleagues, and other variables unique to each teacher. Because of the numerous independent variables that influence beginning teachers’ responses to induction, an experiment that isolated the impact of induction was not possible. A case study approach, however, provided insight into beginning teachers’ responses to their induction support. This approach was also selected based on Merriam’s

(1998) definition of a case as “a phenomenon that is inherently bounded, with a finite amount of time for data collection or a limited number of people who could be interviewed or observed” (p. 27). Because the participants would only have one 1st-year of teaching, the opportunity for obtaining good data with the subjects was limited. The following research questions guided the case study: How are 1st-year teachers supported during induction and how do they respond to this support?

### Data Collection and Analysis

Phone interviews, emails, teacher journals, and exit interviews were used to answer the research questions. The principal data for this investigation were collected through monthly interviews with each participant. The interviews were semi-structured, and four questions provided the initial framework.

1. How is teaching going so far this year/since the last time we talked?
2. How did your student teaching experiences prepare you for your 1st year of teaching?
3. What additional experiences (in student teaching) might have been helpful?
4. Is there anything you would like to bring up that I haven't asked about?

Depending on how detailed the response was, I would ask follow-up questions. After the first three interviews, it became clear that the second and third questions provided less meaningful information than I anticipated when I designed the investigation. Instead of investigating beginning teachers' induction experiences and retroactive evaluation of their student teaching experiences, which was my initial objective when I began, my emphasis switched to induction based on the themes that emerged in the data.

Since the participants' induction experiences provided such intriguing data, I replaced the second and third questions. The new questions followed-up on aspects of each participant's induction experience based on information they shared in previous interviews. I implemented this new questioning technique for the fourth set of interviews. The questions were different for each participant and each subsequent interview. The following sample from the notes I took during my January interview with Stella provides an example of how I developed questions for the next interview.

*Stella:* The whole mentor system they have set up here is something I'm kind of frustrated with.

*Researcher Comment:* She has an assigned mentor and it sounds like she is not providing much guidance.

*Stella:* They shouldn't assign mentors; they should let you find your own.

*Researcher Comment:* She has developed an incredible, authentic relationship with her AP. They're “done” with the induction program in February; this means she no longer has to work with her assigned mentor.

*Note to self* (written after reviewing the interview notes): These are themes to follow up on. See what happens to Stella's relationship with her mentor after induction ends. Becca also mentioned that her principal has basically

become her mentor. Find out if she has an “assigned” mentor or not and if the sort of organic mentoring relationship with her principal developed with sanction or just on its own. (January 11, 2005)

Based on these notes, in February I asked Stella, “How have you interacted with your mentor since we talked in January?” I asked Becca, “Do you have an assigned mentor? How did your principal come to serve as a mentor?” The new approach to developing interview questions contributed to more focused data collection.

The interviews ranged between 15 and 50 minutes long and were conducted over the phone. The latter was based on necessity; the participants taught in three different states in two time zones, while the researcher resided in a fourth state in a third time zone. I took notes during each interview and then expanded on them immediately after each interview. Because of the time differences, the interviews were always conducted in the evening. I revisited the interview data the next morning and used a journal to assist me with researcher reflexivity. Kleinsasser (2000) explained the purpose,

Researcher reflexivity represents a methodical process of learning about self as researcher, which, in turn, illuminates deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question. Qualitative researchers engage in reflexivity because they have reason to believe good data result. (p. 155)

Participant-initiated emails and participants’ teaching journals provided additional data. These additional data were collected because they helped me understand the interviews more fully. Participant-initiated emails and journal entries often addressed topics that were discussed in interviews. For example, a week after our April interview, Shari sent me an email with the subject, “I NEED SOME HELP!!!” In the text of the message she explained that she had been invited to apply for a job in another school district and asked for my opinion about how she should proceed. Her email provided additional details about her contract renewal--something we discussed in an earlier interview. The additional information helped to clarify questions I had after reviewing my interview notes. The email contact was beneficial because it kept me informed about Shari’s induction experiences in the time between our monthly interviews. Exit interviews served as the final data point, providing a sense of closure for the investigation.

I began data analysis during data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Analyzing and gathering data simultaneously allowed me to structure subsequent data collection efforts based on emerging themes and hunches, while avoiding collecting unfocused, repetitious, and voluminous data (Merriam, 1998). This process also allowed me to use the participants’ first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation to create a two-way dialogue about the meaning of the emerging data (Toma, 2000). This process began in earnest starting with the fourth set of interviews. By this point I had narrowed the focus of the investigation to participants’ induction experiences, themes were emerging, and I began asking focused questions to evaluate the accuracy of what I thought I was seeing. The example at the start of this section about how I developed some of February’s interview questions based on January’s data demonstrates how this unfolded.

Open coding was used in early analysis to identify categories of data and major themes. Open coding is a technique where the researcher goes through raw data line by line and comes up with a summary term for each statement. When all data have been summarized, the researcher looks for bigger common categories into which some of the summaries fit. These bigger categories help the researcher describe themes in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used descriptive and interpretative categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to code the data. QSR NUD\*IST NVIVO (NVivo; Richards, 1999), a qualitative research software program, was used to facilitate data analysis. NVivo creates printouts of data by code so cross-case similarities and differences can be easily identified. Raw data were transferred directly into NVivo, read, and then coded. The following excerpt of raw data from a November 30, 2004 interview with Laura was coded “increased comfort with teaching.”

*Researcher:* How is teaching going so far this year/since the last time we talked?

*Laura:* A lot better. Um. It’s just falling into place I think. I don’t have any other explanation for it. I’m not quite sure what happened, but it did.  
[Lengthy pause.]

*Researcher Comment:* I prompted her to explain what is easier or better.

*Laura:* I feel like the routine has finally clicked with my students...

Afterwards, data were analyzed using a multi-step process based on Miles and Huberman’s (1994) work. First, I identified repetitive patterns in the interview notes. Then, I looked for patterns across participants. Data from emails, journal entries, and exit interviews for each teacher were used to confirm the recurring patterns. For example, all of the participants shared information about their relationships with their principals. Becca, Shari, and Laura had similar experiences that suggested a pattern of dissatisfaction with the teacher/principal relationship. Outlier experiences were also identified and analyzed. For example, since Stella’s experience did not fit into the dissatisfaction pattern, I discussed her experience differently in the results section of this article.

### **Credibility Procedures**

Results from a qualitative study are strengthened when the findings are reliable, which is established through having a detailed list of procedures so that a later investigator can follow the same procedures and come to the same or similar conclusions (Yin, 1994). In this way, conclusions are based on the participants and their experiences, not on the investigator’s interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The detailed analysis procedures described earlier support this study’s reliability. Additionally, I analyzed multiple data sources (interview notes, participant-initiated emails, and teaching journals) in order to better understand the phenomenon under investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Multiple data sources also supported triangulation of the data, a procedure that increases the validity of findings when the same themes emerge in different sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Beginning analysis during the study and discussing the emerging findings with the subjects was an approach to data analysis that also supported member checking. Member checking is a procedure that reduces researcher subjectivity, and thus promotes reliability by allowing the participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of their words and thoughts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and promotes accuracy and validity when reporting results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Results**

### **Time and Collegiality**

"Everyone keeps telling me the 1st year is the hardest, and it better be because otherwise I don't want to do this." – Stella, September 14, 2004

Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura faced challenges common to beginning teachers. All four began the school year working long hours; 10-12 hour days during the week plus 10 or more hours on the weekend were common. Stella reported being so exhausted that she went to bed as early as 7:45pm during the first month of school. Each participant experimented with different strategies to make their schedules more manageable. By late October, they had found more balanced approaches. Shari explained,

I kind of fell into a pattern. I prioritize what I need to do at school when I've got more energy. I'm saving the "busy work" (like prepping centers stuff) for home when I'm tired and in front of the TV. I probably should have figured this out earlier! I'm also trying to develop centers that I can use all year rather than just for a short period of time... I'm still trying to get more and more done. That's the hardest part of being a new teacher – I don't have a very big repertoire. (October 24, 2004)

Laura expressed a similar opinion when she explained, "I just don't have anything prepared. I keep thinking, 'Next year I won't have to do that'" (September 23, 2004). In October, Shari and Laura began working through lunch and all the breaks during the day. Laura explained, "Instead of going and sitting in the lounge [during recess], I work through that time because you can get a lot done in 15 minutes" (October 26, 2004). Laura maintained this schedule throughout the school year. Shari, however, found that working through breaks, especially lunch, coincided with a period of time when she was discouraged about her profession.

I really enjoy teaching, and I really enjoy the kids, but it's all the other stuff that gets me down. It just seems like it's been the last little while. I wonder if it's because I've kind of isolated myself. Just a little bit. I've started to work during lunch and grading papers. I still eat, but I'm just getting things done. I've talked to [my husband] a little bit about this, and he thinks maybe I should stop being such a hermit... I wonder if I've hurt my relationships with the other teachers. (November 29, 2004)

Eventually, Shari found more balance by working through her breaks, but having lunch with her colleagues.

Negotiating a balance between work and collegial relationships proved problematic for Stella as well. Stella taught in a school where two veteran teachers were assigned as mentors for all of the new teachers in her building. Her experience seems to support Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, and Ballou's (2002) assertion that developing effective mentoring relationships is not a mechanical process with guaranteed results based on random assignment. Stella and her assigned mentor did not form a strong connection, but Stella did find an authentic mentor in one of her building administrators. They connected on a personal as well as professional level, and their relationship provided Stella with comfort and support. As a result, in contrast to research about how beginning teachers hesitate to seek guidance because they do not want to appear unqualified (Huling-Austin, 1986; Valli, 1997), Stella was confident turning to her administrators for help. Stella's assigned mentor told her, "You shouldn't let the administration think you don't know what you're doing" (October 14, 2004) and advised Stella to turn to her instead. So, Stella found herself in the position of having to choose between continuing her relationship with her administrator and following the advice of her assigned mentor. Stella continued the relationship, but refrained from consulting the administrator during the regular school day. This compromise would not have been necessary had her assigned mentor recognized the value of Stella's authentic mentoring relationship.

Becca began the school year working long hours, but in contrast to the other participants, she found them manageable and rewarding. Becca's biggest challenge involved developing collegial relationships with the other teachers at her grade-level. She explained, "The teaching part is going great. Being with the kids is amazing. It's the school routine, working with other teachers that's going not so amazing" (September 15, 2004). Becca's grade-level colleagues had been teaching together for a decade. They also had classrooms next to one another, while Becca's was in another part of the school. The combination of geographic isolation and being a new member of an established team led to some misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and minimal collaboration. The disappointing and challenging start to her relationships with her teammates was a source of stress throughout Becca's first semester. Early in the year she was optimistic about improving the situation. Becca commented, "[My colleagues] got into a routine and they got a system going. It's just going to take time [for me to become a part of that]" (September 15, 2004). By January Becca had stopped bringing up the problems during our monthly interviews. When I asked her about this she said,

I realized I was taking it personally. So we're not a close team, but I'm ready to focus on my job and stop fretting on it. I've realized this is a job, and you have to get along with your co-workers, but you're going to have differences of opinion. So you have to learn to deal with it. (April 13, 2005)

The holiday vacation in December allowed Becca to distance herself from the situation. By the end of the year, she reported that they were still not a close team, and she did not expect them to become one. As with Stella's solution to her mentoring dilemma, Becca's

distancing solution worked but would not have been necessary had her veteran colleagues responded differently to their new colleague.

### **The Transition from Student Teacher to Teacher**

“My motto this year is ‘Keep my eyes wide open and my mouth shut tight’” – Becca, September 15, 2005.

I began this investigation with visions of identifying a list of improvements schools of education could implement to make student teaching more helpful. This objective was timely considering the U.S. Department of Education’s recent suggestion that student teaching is an unnecessary step in producing quality teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Since this criticism defies what many consider an essential part of having high standards for teachers (Chase, 2002), research that identifies ways to improve student teaching and verifies its value in teacher preparation seems essential. Since the four case study participants were graduates of the same program, I thought they would identify similar strengths and weaknesses in their teacher preparation. As I began collecting data, it quickly became apparent that this assumption was naïve. There was very little consistency in what Stella, Becca, Laura, and Shari felt well-prepared for as 1st-year teachers despite having similar experiences as members of the same cohort during their teacher preparation program.

For Stella, the biggest challenge stemmed from teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade after student teaching in a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. The students had higher skill levels and abilities, and initially, Stella struggled with planning and teaching. In our first interview she said,

I was ready to quit the Tuesday after we started... everything was overwhelming. I know I student taught the first day [of school] but it’s different when it’s all on you. I need to get my feet under me, but they’re just not there yet. (September 14, 2004)

Stella did get her feet under her, but it took a while. The curriculum at Stella’s school left a lot of curricular decisions up to the individual teacher. While this sort of freedom might be refreshing for a veteran teacher, it proved daunting for a beginner. Stella explained, “I don’t really know what direction to go since there’s not really a curriculum” (October 14, 2004). She found it easier to plan in “small bites” rather than looking at the big, overwhelming, picture (September 14, 2004). She commented, “I think the biggest challenge is just trying to come up with enough curriculum. It’s hard because I don’t know if it is going to work or not” (November 30, 2004).

Recent literature recommends helping beginning teachers to avoid this sort of trial and error approach to curricular decision making (Boger & Boger, 2000; Freiberg, 2002). Providing beginning teachers with binders filled with curriculum resources is one recommended solution (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005). Given Stella’s teaching assignment to a grade that was unfamiliar to her and the lack of a structured curriculum, Stella was forced to try things and refine them when they were less successful than she wanted. She wrote the following in her journal, “I found a quote by Winston Churchill that I think sums up what a first-year teacher should do: ‘Try something and if it doesn’t

work, try something else, but above all, try something!’” (September, 14, 2004). Stella reported looking forward to her 2nd year of teaching when she would have a starting point for her curriculum.

In contrast, Becca’s first teaching position was at the same grade level at which she had student taught. Unlike Stella, Becca was able to envision the path her instruction would take over the course of the year. Becca organized general plans for guided reading and math groups before the start of school. As a result, she only had to develop her social studies and science plans during the school year.

Becca credited her easy transition into the instruction and planning parts of her first teaching job to how hard she worked during student teaching. She treated student teaching like a 50-60 hour a week job and completed that semester with a detailed classroom management and organizational plan that she was able to implement her 1st year teaching. Becca explained,

Really, student teaching, especially [my mentor teacher], got me on-line in terms of getting my filing system set up and having everything ready to roll for the first day of school. It is amazing how much paper you get at the beginning of school. If you don’t have a system ready to go, you would be swamped. I have a file for parents stuff, curriculum stuff... I already had plans for parent communication. That took 20 minutes for me to do. I’ve already made my first phone calls home... My behavior management plan was already ready to copy and send home. (September 15, 2004)

Becca was not the typical beginning teacher described in the literature who faces struggles that, at times, seem insurmountable (Freiberg, 2002; McCann et al., 2005; Patterson, 2005; Veenman, 1984). Becca regularly surprised me by the little extra things she accomplished during her 1st year teaching. For example, Becca made a survival kit for her substitute teachers, the first of which came to her class in early September so she could attend a conference. The survival kit included “gum, snacks in case they forget their lunch, and 50 cents for a pop” (September 15, 2004). Instead, Becca’s challenges were in two main areas. As discussed in the section about time and collegiality, Becca struggled to develop effective collegial relationships with her grade-level teaching team. Becca also craved more support from her administrator and wished student teaching had provided her with experience interacting with administration because “this is such a big part of your teaching career” (September 15, 2004). This situation is discussed further in the section titled *Mentoring and Administrative Support*.

For Shari, the biggest adjustment was coming to terms with how much more work there was than she expected. Although she had worked hard during student teaching, the number of responsibilities she had as an in-service teacher increased dramatically. For example, her district was undergoing a curriculum review process, and Shari served on one of the committees. This sort of after school responsibility that lasted until 5 pm or later was not something she was used to having. Shari’s first teaching position was at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level and she student taught in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Unlike Stella, however, this adjustment was not problematic for her. Shari enjoyed the different age group and found them more enthusiastic than the older children (September 21, 2004).

In contrast to Shari, Laura, who was a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, found it difficult to adjust to teaching a different grade. In retrospect, she decided her student teaching placement was problematic. Laura explained,

I wish I would have not been in a half-day kindergarten. I don't think half-day prepares you teach for the full day. I didn't have a clue for how to teach guided reading because we didn't get to that in the half-day. (October 26, 2004)

Laura, like Shari, was taken aback by the number of responsibilities for which she was not prepared. She had not helped to prepare report cards, for example, and felt challenged when she completed this task for the first time.

The final inconsistency with the four participants' reflections on the transition from student teacher to teacher concerned classroom management. Stella and Becca felt comfortable with this responsibility, while Laura and Shari shared some concerns. Stella explained,

Right now I feel like I'm way tougher about classroom management than I want to be. I don't know if control is the word I want to use. I know that I'm going to relax it a little bit. I want them to understand what my expectations are and if they're willing to work towards that, we can have fun, too. I think I am confident about that because [my mentor] and I had the same classroom management style so it reinforced it. (September 14, 2004)

On November 30, 2004 Stella reported, "I'm to the point now where I can just be myself and joke around with the kids more. Now they know I'm serious." Laura, in contrast, often reported struggles with classroom management and student motivation. Shari found two students extremely challenging and that experience influenced her overall perceptions of her confidence with classroom management. She also found herself wishing her teacher preparation program had provided more guidance for managing intermediate and upper elementary classrooms. Early in the year she explained, "I think I'm being a little too permissive. A bigger bag of classroom management tricks would have been helpful. I don't think [what we learned in college] works for the upper grades" (September 21, 2004). These inconsistencies in confidence about different aspects of their teaching seem to suggest that, like the students they teach, beginning teachers have different strengths and weaknesses and thus may require differentiated support.

### **Mentoring and Administrative Support**

"If I had it all to do over again, I would ask for a mentor who has been around for longer and has things figured out" – Laura, October 26, 2004.

Stella, Shari, and Laura were each assigned a mentor teacher. Shari and Laura's mentors were teachers at the same grade level, while Stella was assigned one of two teachers who served as mentors for every new teacher in her school. Becca's school

district had no mentoring program. As Laura's quote at the beginning of this section suggests, her mentor was new to the grade level at which they both taught. The mentor also was in her 4th year of teaching, which is just one year beyond the induction years (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Her mentor was sympathetic, but she was unable to provide adequate support because she was also new to the position. Shari's mentor was a veteran teacher with nearly 3 decades of experience, and although she was able to provide a lot of guidance, miscommunications were common in their relationship. Shari considered her more of a friend than someone who helped her with curriculum and instruction (May 3, 2005).

As discussed earlier in the section about time and collegiality, Stella did not have a strong connection with her assigned mentor but developed an unofficial supportive mentoring relationship with one of her administrators. The formally-assigned mentor taught at a different grade level and did not share a planning time with Stella. Unfortunately for Stella, shared planning time and same grade level teaching assignments are characteristics that contribute to more effective mentoring relationships (Ganser, 2001) and reduce the likelihood of attrition (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The lack of a shared planning time created challenges with scheduling post-observation discussions. Once, Stella had a 3-week gap between an observation and meeting with her mentor. The induction program drew to a close after the final meeting in March. A few weeks later, Stella reported that her mentor "basically doesn't talk to me anymore, now that we're done with induction" (April 14, 2005). Brock and Grady (1998) have also reported problems with mentoring and induction programs having official, pre-determined end dates.

Stella's unofficial mentor was also the administrator assigned as her formal evaluator. Stella received feedback that she found helpful as she forged through her 1st year teaching. In November she had her second formal observation and reflected,

I thought it went terrible [laughter]. I had [my administrator] come in during my worst class, the one I have the most trouble with, because I wanted some pointers. While she was there a kid threw a book across the room, a kid kicked another under the desk... but, [my administrator] had some good suggestions for me about questioning techniques and classroom management! (November 30, 2004)

Stella's comfort with her administrator was reflected by her eagerness to be observed during her most problematic class. Stella trusted her administrator and knew she could count on her for constructive feedback.

Stella was the only participant who felt supported by her administrator. Although Becca's administrator had an open door and she could turn to him with questions, Becca felt she could not get constructive feedback. Becca explained that when she asked for more critical feedback, her principal said he often forgot she was a 1st-year teacher and had to remind himself to check on her (April 13, 2005). After her final evaluation for the school year Becca said,

I don't know. I feel [my high evaluation is] false security right now. I'm a 1st-year teacher. I've got a lot to learn. It's not going to hurt my feelings if I get told I need to work on something. I don't want to have my scores go down [in two years] because I'm up for tenure. And I told him that. I told him I'm scared of that. (April 13, 2005)

During the exit interview, I asked Becca to comment on overall level of support she received from her principal. She said,

He is always willing to listen and that is a form of support. He's never given me any form of constructive criticism. None. I don't know how he expects me to grow if I don't have anything to reach for. All of the goals that I am striving for are ones I've set myself. He hasn't set any for me. Maybe I just have a distorted view of what a principal should do because I've never had an administrator before. The only kind of support that I received was something that I generated. It was me going to another faculty or staff member and saying, "This is the situation I'm facing. What do you think?" (May 4, 2005)

Becca's desire for more feedback remained unfulfilled at the end of the school year.

Like Becca, Shari did not receive constructive feedback from her administrator. Shari reported that all of her evaluations were glowing and positive. Sometimes she only got to spend five minutes with her administrator for post-evaluation conferences (February 8, 2005). Shari's evaluations throughout the school year were disappointing to her because she would indicate the areas where she thought she needed to improve and her administrator said they were fine. By her final evaluation, Shari thought her administrator listened to her self-evaluation comments more closely.

What I said about myself is what went on in my final evaluation. I didn't say that I was excellent in everything because I don't feel that way, and he keeps telling me I'm excellent in everything. It made me feel good that he took my opinion seriously and my evaluation of myself seriously. At the same time, he didn't offer a lot of feedback about how to improve in all of these areas. A lot of his feedback stems from not wanting me to burn out because I arrive at school each morning 30 minutes before contract time. I feel like I am doing what has to be done, not burning out. (March 3, 2005)

Shari characterized the support she received from her administrator as "pretty much benign neglect" (May 3, 2005).

Like Becca and Shari, Laura received less administrative feedback than she would have liked. Laura also received less feedback than she was entitled; her district required three formal observations of beginning teachers. She only had one observation where the principal stayed for a full lesson and met with her afterwards to discuss her teaching. Her second and third observations were both in February and were one week apart. During one of these, the administrator briefly circulated among the students during center time while Laura worked with a guided reading group. Guided reading was one of Laura's

self-identified areas targeted for improvement and the administrator did not observe her teaching it (February 8, 2005). She never was asked to meet with her principal after the second and third observations. At the end of the year Laura said, “I would have liked a little bit more [feedback]. It might have helped me feel more confident (May 4, 2005).

### **Induction Meetings**

“I’m ready to be done with this whole stupid induction thing” – Stella, January 11, 2005.

Stella’s comment about her induction experience reflects her disappointment with the two components of her official induction program. The first, her officially assigned mentor, did not provide the connection or support she was seeking (see the sections titled *Time and Collegiality* and *Mentoring and Administrative Support* for further discussion). The second component of Stella’s induction program involved meetings for all of the new teachers in her district. The first meeting was held in mid-September and involved an all-day workshop. For Stella, the potential benefits of this opportunity were negated because she needed to prepare plans for a substitute teacher during a time when she was still figuring out how to plan for herself. She decided “[the induction meetings are] basically a repeat of college. Last time, for example, we had the special education teacher and it was just a repeat of things I already knew” (January 11, 2005).

Stella was the only participant in this study who had the opportunity, much less was required, to participate in a formal induction program with two or more of the components Smith and Ingersoll (2004) described as being most beneficial for supporting beginning teachers’ success. Shari was the only 1st-year teacher in her school district. Since the district was too small to provide a comprehensive induction program, Shari was given the opportunity to attend two state-level conferences and found these learning opportunities helpful. Laura attended required training sessions for the district’s reading program. All of the teachers who were new to the district, whether veterans who transferred from another district or 1st-year teachers, attended the same sessions. For Laura, these trainings helped her improve in an area where she considered herself deficient because she did not get to teach guided reading groups during student teaching. Becca’s school district had meetings for teachers who were new to the district, but her principal did not have her attend because the topics were about cooperative grouping and other teaching techniques that Becca had already demonstrated the ability to use effectively. Becca was relieved that she did not have to attend the meetings since she knew the content, but wished she had opportunities to get to know other beginning teachers.

### **Discussion**

This study examined the induction experiences of four 1st-year teachers and how they responded to available induction support. The findings indicated that these 4 beginning teachers had different support needs. The participants also received variable forms of support. The one common experience seemed to be the inadequate nature of the induction support each participant received.

Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) research on induction appears to be the most comprehensive in the literature, yet the quantitative data set they used did not ask questions about whether or not the forms of induction were meaningful. In the current investigation, the participant who received the best induction combination (best meaning the combination that has the greatest likelihood of reducing attrition) was dissatisfied with her induction experience. Therefore, Table I highlights the support each teacher received using the forms of induction Smith and Ingersoll analyzed in order to provide a framework for discussing the present investigation's results. As discussed in the literature review, basic induction (mentoring and supportive communication from an administrator) has no statistically significant impact on reducing the predicated level of attrition (with no induction support, predicted attrition was 40%; with basic induction, predicted attrition was 39%). When basic induction was combined with Level II, the predicted level of attrition was reduced to 27%, and when combined with II and III, the rate was reduced to 18%.

Table 1

*Forms of Induction Support*

Support	Stella	Laura	Shari	Becca
Basic Induction: mentoring & supportive communication from an administrator	Both	Both	Both	Supportive communication only
Level II: common planning time with other grade or content area teachers, or seminars for beginning teachers	Both	Planning time only	Planning time only	Planning time only
Level III: participation in external teaching network, reduced number of preparations, or an aide	None	None	None	An aide only

Comparing this summary of the participants' induction experiences to Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) levels of induction support presents an interesting synthesis. Based on the number of support components, it appears that Stella received the "best" induction. However, she only found two of the components worthwhile: administrator communication and common planning time. Laura received three induction components, but mentoring was problematic because her assigned mentor was new to teaching at her grade level and only a 4th-year teacher. Although she found the communication from her administrator supportive, the frequency, form, and duration were inadequate. Shari's

mentoring and common planning time were somewhat helpful, but she found the communication from her administrator too supportive. Instead, she would have preferred critical feedback in addition to praise. Becca shared the latter concern, and her common planning time was rarely spent with the other teachers at her grade level because of their unsuccessful team dynamics. In conclusion, for the four 1st-year teachers in this study, the amount of induction support received did not correspond to satisfaction in terms of their perceptions of the effectiveness of their induction support. Nevertheless, all four continued teaching after their 1st year.

Using Smith and Ingersoll's (2004) results as a guide, Shari, Stella, Laura, and Becca's experiences each lacked one or more of the possible components of induction that seem to have the greatest impact on new teacher retention. Three of the four participants were frustrated with the feedback they received from their administrators, a phenomenon that suggests a worthwhile area for future study is an investigation of principals' approaches to beginning teacher evaluation. If Shari, Laura, and Becca's experiences are at all reflective of experiences the larger population of 1st-year teachers receives, beginning teachers need more constructive feedback from their principals. Shari and Becca knew they were not perfect as 1st-year teachers, but they were not able to self-identify all of the ways in which they might improve. Guidance from their administrators and veteran colleagues contributes to beginning teachers' professional development. This means identifying areas in need of growth and co-developing improvement plans as well as praising and acknowledging good practice.

If the variety in perceived quality of induction support the participants received is representative of the experiences of the larger population of beginning teachers, the need to focus on whether or not teachers receive induction seems secondary to the need to evaluate the quality of existing induction programs. The inadequate components of Stella, Shari, Laura, and Becca's induction experience often amounted to being time-consuming annoyances rather than assistive measures. Rather than having induction support in name only, new research should endeavor to assess program quality and help programs improve by providing assistance and feedback that beginning teachers recognize as meaningful.

There has been a growing trend in professional development to avoid "one size fits all" approaches where veteran teachers and beginners all receive the same forms of training. This trend recognizes teachers' developmental spectrum and endeavors to provide salient professional development (Marzano, 2003). This same approach may be appropriate for induction. The participants in this study indicated a range of competencies and self-perceived deficit areas. For example, Stella, who was comfortable with her approach to classroom management, would have benefited more from induction meetings about implementing guided reading groups instead of classroom management sessions. Meanwhile, Laura would have liked further opportunities to learn about classroom management as well as guided reading. Just as teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction for their diverse students in K-12 classrooms, school districts should differentiate professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers.

In summary, I present the following list of suggestions for how Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura's induction experiences could have been strengthened.

## **Mentoring**

- Assign new teachers caring, eager, and capable mentors who have a common planning period and teach at the same (or close) grade level / content area. The mentors should be veteran teachers with at least one year of experience at the grade level they are currently teaching.
- Assign new teachers to classrooms that keep them near their teaching teammates to facilitate collaboration and support. Also assign common planning time with grade level or curricular colleagues.
- Support new teachers in developing mentoring relationships with educators other than their assigned mentor. This includes responding positively if such relationships develop authentically as well as by providing opportunities for new teachers to collaborate with veteran teachers.

## **Practical Support**

- Provide curricular resources for beginning teachers.
- Encourage a school climate where beginning and veteran teachers comfortably ask colleagues and administrators for help so beginning teachers are confident asking for help.
- Offer differentiated professional development opportunities as part of induction programs.

## **Administrative and Mentoring Evaluations**

- Schedule post-observation conferences within a week of the classroom observation.
- Offer feedback on the teaching goals novices have self-identified.
- Offer constructive feedback about deficit areas.
- Help beginning teachers brainstorm ways to improve their self-identified concerns.

Shari, Stella, Becca, and Laura are individuals who seemed to need differentiated induction support. Because no list of recommendations is exhaustive, it is imperative to nurture beginning teachers' individual strengths, while helping them improve deficit areas in order to avoid one size fits all induction.

## **Researcher Reflections**

When I designed this study, I intentionally adapted a research design that allowed me to be subjective, care about my participants, become an insider, and make meaning of the study's data with the participants (Toma, 2000). What I did not anticipate was that I would essentially become part of the very phenomenon I was investigating: the participants' induction experience. I was a constant in Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura's lives who knew their strengths and weaknesses as teachers, knew details of their pre-service teaching preparation curriculum, and believed they had potential to be highly successful teachers. Because of our history, the participants did more than share their

induction experiences with me through our interviews; they turned to me with questions and asked for my advice throughout their 1st year of teaching.

My continued support and mentoring of Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura was mutually rewarding. At the conclusion of the study, I asked each to participate in a second year of this study. All four readily agreed and commented on how much they looked forward to our monthly interviews. This study was also a unique experience for all of us since the professor/student role typically ends with college graduation. Since I was supervising student teachers in elementary schools while I was conducting this investigation, I found myself able to apply information from my research to my supervision. For example, after Laura told me how overwhelmed she was calculating grades and performing assessments for report cards since she had not done this during student teaching (October 26, 2004), I made sure my current student teachers got this experience. Induction is helpful because it helps beginning teachers make the transition from being students of teaching to teachers of students. This investigation helped me stay more connected to in-service practice, thus helping me to bridge the gap between the theoretical world of higher education and practicing world of in-service teachers.

### **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Study**

Because of limitations to this study, the results may not be generalizable to a larger population. Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura were all graduates of the same elementary education teacher preparation program. The participants were also all female, between 22-24 years of age, and taught in rural or suburban school districts. Additionally, each of the participants was a successful 1st-year teacher. Although each worked long hours and faced numerous challenges, none were overwhelmed by the classroom management and organizational horrors that cause some beginners to abandon the profession. First-year teachers with different education backgrounds, working in different school districts, working in different parts of education such as secondary or special education, or who struggle to be successful may have responded differently to the same induction experiences.

The limitations created by the small, heterogeneous sample in this investigation suggest a need for future investigations about 1st-year teacher responses to induction experiences using more diverse participants. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to investigate how beginners value their induction experiences. Such research has the potential to help school districts refine their induction efforts to better meet beginning teachers' needs.

I hesitate to declare my close relationship with the participants a limitation of the study because it was an intentional part of the research design. However, since I essentially became part of the participants' induction support, my ability to evaluate Stella, Shari, Becca, and Laura's responses to their "school-based" induction experiences may have been impacted. This development indicates two opportunities for further study. First, I suggest a future study that partially replicates the design of this study, but have researchers investigate the induction experiences of 1st-year teachers they already know and 1st-year teachers they do not know. Such a study could provide valuable data about school-based induction as well as the impact a researcher investigating induction has on participants' induction experiences. Second, investigating the benefits of or lack of higher

education faculty involvement in the induction experiences of their former students could provide information that can help forge strong school-university partnerships.

In summary, this study provided insight into the induction experiences of four beginning teachers. Each would have benefited from an induction experience that responded more appropriately to beginning teachers' needs, by providing a mentor who was experienced and accessible, by providing evaluative administrative feedback that offered guidance for growth as well as praise, and by offering trainings and workshops on topics that do not replicate teacher preparation program experiences. Because of the small number of participants, the results of this study may not be generalizable to the larger population of beginning teachers. However, the results of this qualitative investigation do suggest opportunities for future quantitative investigations with larger samples. Partnerships of qualitative and quantitative investigations, along with partnerships of caring veteran educators and novices, can contribute to improving the induction experiences of beginning teachers.

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