The Role of Administrators in Career and Technical Teacher Induction

BRIAN SANDFORD
Pittsburgh State University

MARY JO SELF
Oklahoma State University

Abstract

Now in its 9th year of implementation, Oklahoma's Career Tech New Teacher Induction (NTI) has an overall retention rate of 82.6%. A team approach is used and collaboration occurs between local administrators, a local mentor, and a higher education representative. This manuscript focuses on 3 years of both qualitative and quantitative data concerning the role of administrators in the process. Challenges for the administrators include issues outside the locus of control, accommodating the new teachers as they acclimate, and helping the teacher understand the barriers associated with the lack of teaching and organizational navigation experience. Positives of the process include enhanced communication, teamwork, and active engagement. The overall strengths of the NTI program are its systematic year-long approach, its committed participants, and its focus on the retention of new teachers by meeting their needs during the critical first-year experience.

Introduction

Beginning in 2000, the New Teacher Induction process has focused on providing a support system for beginning career and technical teachers in Oklahoma. This support system is a cooperative effort involving a local school administrator, a mentor who is a practicing teacher, and a field representative from a higher

education institution. These individuals form a team that works closely with new career and technical teachers and strives to develop an atmosphere of trust and openness in which the new teacher can develop the organizational, professional, pedagogical, and cultural skills necessary to succeed and to thrive, or perhaps just to survive. From 2000–2005, 253 teams have participated in the process with an overall retention rate of 82.6%. This manuscript reports on data compiled during those first 5 years of the project. One sign that the project is being successful is that for the 2006–2007 school year, the number of new teachers was lower than in previous years at just 40 new teachers.

This project is funded with two main sources of revenue; the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology education and the local technology centers located across the state. Given the infusion of technology centers' monies, it is understandable that local administrators have a strong investment in the process. Each of these administrators is carefully chosen by the local center. The chosen administrator is not the administrator who has direct supervisory responsibilities for the new teacher or teachers involved in the Induction process, but rather one who is familiar with local policies and procedures, as well as the prevailing "culture" of the local career and technical center.

Methods

Many lessons have been learned throughout the process. This manuscript will review the research data specifically gathered from the administrators. A mixed method approach of both qualitative and quantitative research methods has been used with surveys, Likert scales for benchmarks of the process, and face-to-face interviews. Identifying the common threads of the administrators' perceptions who participated in the New Teacher Induction program (NTI) for the years 2000–2001 (referred to as 01), 2001–2002 (referred to as 02), and 2004–2005 (referred to as 05) resulted in three basic data sets due to the differences in the questions posed to the administrators for each year of collection. However, several salient points are discernable for each year with notable parallels as well as some intra-association within certain themes. Fifty-one administrators comprised the accessible survey population. Administrator responses were analyzed for each year to determine the commonalities among their perceptions for that year. Subsequently, common ideas within and between years were then condensed into thematic categories. The categories were developed with the intent to help understand the information without compromising either the meaning or the richness of the responses.

Eight questions provide the foundation of interpreting and understanding the relevant data collected in this study. They are:

1. What are some of the positives or benefits of being a teacher in education today and, identify and list the reasons why you are an educator?

2. What are some of the challenges of being in education today?
3. What is the greatest challenge for the new teacher?
4. Describe the support you as an administrator provide to the new faculty, and the characteristics you possess that enable you to be a good educator/administrator.
5. What role do you play in mentoring the first year teacher?
6. What advice would you give to new teachers?
7. Describe the negatives outcomes of the New Teacher Induction Program.
8. Describe the positive outcomes of the New Teacher Induction Program.

Findings

Concerning question #1, administrator responses to the positive aspects of being a teacher or why they decided to become an educator principally related to intrinsic rewards. Responses focused on the following subcategories:

- Helping students to grow and learn;
- Effecting change and improving the lives of young people;
- The love or enjoyment gained from teaching; and
- Making a difference in the lives of students.

While many of the remaining questions in this analysis received more pragmatic responses, administrators seemed to approach this question with a more altruistic philosophy. The nature of the responses reflect well on those administrators who participated in the survey in that their perceptions most probably reflect the attitudes of many people regarding why they would want somebody involved in educating students, because they enjoy what they do—teaching, and having a positive effect on people's lives—making a difference.

In describing the challenges of being in education, administrators identified issues outside the locus of control as the important area of concern. Responses congregated in the following subcategories:

- Lack of parental support and intervention in the education of students;
- Student discipline issues and the lack of respect for authority;
- State mandates, regulations, and politics;
- Money and competing for scarce resources; and
- Student apathy and a lack of motivation.

While it is recognized that administrators do have some influence in the subcategory areas, it is speculative to assume that these issues can be directly affected in consideration of their primary roles as administrators rather than, for example, as counselors, police officers, a parent or legal guardian of all students, legislators, or lobbyists. It was noted by the reviewer of the data that there was an

undercurrent of frustration and disappointment evident in the response sets for this question in that administrators, while cognizant of these challenges, are also aware that their ability and authority to effect change is most likely minimal or nonexistent. This may partially be due to the scope and nature of the issues as well as the limitations or requirements of an administrator in the technical school system. Additionally, the amount of time required to fulfill the normal routines and duties of an administrator may prohibit their ability to become fully involved in influencing these areas of concern.

Administrators felt that the greatest challenge for new teachers were barriers associated with the lack of teaching and organizational navigation experience. Their thoughts focused on the reality of new teachers not having the information or experience to know what the institutional norms and expectations would be for both teaching and being an effective organizational member. Also evident was the administrator's commitment to try to meet the new teacher's initiation needs in order to help overcome this and other disadvantages. The subcategories for this question are:

- Information about known expectations, organizational intricacies, mandates, requirements, policies and procedures and, student interaction and management;
- Lack of teaching ability and perceptions of new teacher needs; and
- Time management.

In a related but more subtle matter, much of the faculty support as well as the initial challenges for a new teacher are somewhat if not heavily oriented to reducing anxiety and stress in the new teacher. Most administrators in the population indicated that they had either taught in the classroom environment before becoming an administrator and, for those who quantified their response, an average of over 21 years of experience in education was indicated. It seems that having once been a teacher or having a depth of experience in education gives administrators a more empathetic or at least sympathetic approach with what a first-year teacher is likely to experience.

Organizational climate denotes the shared perceptions of members concerning the tone or character of the workplace. Based on the administrators' perceptions, it appears that the distinctive features of an open school climate of cooperation, trust, and respect between the members of the NTI committee, are a primary result of the NTI process. The administrator exhibits the factors of high supportiveness, low directiveness, and low restrictiveness while teachers develop attitudes of low disengagement, high collegial relations, and intimacy with other faculty members—meaning they cooperate and are committed to their work and profession. "In brief, the behavior of both the [administrator] and the faculty is open and authentic" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 146). What is also important to recognize is the ancillary benefit of school health in relation to an

open school climate that, at least by these data sets, is shown to be facilitated by the induction process. There is a correlation between the openness and health of a school; open schools tend to be healthy and healthy schools tend to be open.

The terms appearing in bold in the subcategories are descriptors that are prevalent throughout the remaining questions and are intentionally emphasized to help the reader to begin to see the trends that provide the best overall classification and further interpretation of the data set.

The term developed to describe administrator and/or current faculty support provided to new teachers and/or the characteristics they possessed that enabled them to be good administrators to new faculty was *human relations focused commitments*. The subcategories for this area are:

- Attempt to meet the new teacher's needs and commitment to the new teacher;
- Commitment to teamwork and the mentoring process/concept;
- Establishing open communication;
- Providing avenues for new teachers to receive feedback and other perspectives; and
- Assisting in providing information about known expectations, organizational mandates, requirements, policies, and procedures.

The factors listed in this category relate to the administrator being committed to establishing a process where new teachers can receive new information about their job including such issues as classroom management, student discipline, required reporting and institutional paperwork related demands, etc. These are process related issues concerning both instructional and organizational demands. An important point to be recognized is that administrators are committed not to simply providing open communication and feedback loops directly to teachers but also to other independent sources such as those that would exist in the mentoring relationship and the new teacher induction team-based approach. The responses to this question overwhelmingly gave the indication that the administrators encouraged current faculty to establish meaningful relationships and assist with providing information to the new teacher. The issue of encouraging new teachers to ask questions was also reflected in the item of establishing open communication. Administrators clearly felt that access to information and those people who would be the likely sources of that information was important.

Organizations are information systems, communication systems and decision-making systems (Morgan, 1997). It is gratifying to note that the information provided by the administrators in this study demonstrates that the NTI process, and specifically the form and function of the new teacher induction committee and its members, closely aligns with those things that are inherent to an organization: promoting communication, disseminating information, and ultimately allowing organizational members to make good decisions. Considering the alternatives that are often employed or available to an administrator such as an

autocratic approach ("We'll do it this way"), the bureaucratic approach ("We're supposed to do it this way"), and the technocratic approach ("It's best to do it this way"), the NTI program has helped to formulate a process in which they can implement the democratic approach of "How shall we do it" without having to design and implement a successful process on their own. Administrators become process sponsors and champions rather than process chairpersons or directors.

Question #5 produced information about the self-described role that administrators indicated that they play in mentoring the new teacher, and this were classified as *administrative accommodation toward acclimation and retention.* The trends toward meeting the needs of the new teacher, promoting teamwork, especially through the content mentor, communication, and information about known organizational expectations, are strengthened by the responses to this question. The points emphasized by the administrators are:

- Attempt to meet new teacher needs and a commitment to the new teacher;
- Teamwork;
- Assigning and/or providing resources to the proper content mentor;
- Information about known expectations and organizational procedures;
- Communication; and
- Time management as it relates to providing the new teacher and content mentor the time they need to work together.

The administrators' responses to this question as well as the previous question indicate that compliance with the expectations of the organization as well as those needed in their teaching assignment were areas of emphasis. However more importantly, it can be observed that these areas also overlap what administrators perceived to be the greatest challenges for a new teacher (barriers associated with the lack of teaching and organizational navigation experience [question #3]). Whether accidental or intentional, it appears that the effort that administrators are engaged in or allow their staff to engage in is in alignment with what a new teacher is assumed to need. No doubt, this is a positive and beneficial arrangement in consideration of the purpose of the NTI and the emerging importance of time management in the life of a new teacher. Teamwork, and the perspectives and feedback necessarily associated with effective teamwork, also begin to show their importance concerning the new teacher experience. This would be expected to show itself because of its prevalence in the purpose and design of the NTI program.

Concerning the advice that administrators either model or would provide to new teachers, their recommendation was categorized as *active engagement.* The specific areas of emphasis that contributed to this category are:

- Communication—specifically developing listening skills, listening to students and other instructors, and asking questions;

• Known expectations—specifically becoming aware of organizational requirements; and
• Time management and encouraging the new teachers to give themselves time to adjust.

Once again, knowledge of the institution's policies and procedures and what is expected of organizational members and the skills to communicate through active listening as well as questioning were important attributes that administrators felt new teachers must learn. The issue of time management once again surfaces as an important skill for the new teacher that, in the case of the responses to this question, perhaps relates to reducing stress and anxiety in the new teacher in that they are assured that they do not need to know everything from the beginning of their teaching experience.

The next two items addressing the positive and negative perceptions of the NTI are perhaps the most revealing in that they provide the greatest amount of data in both richness and quantity. When administrators were asked to describe the negative outcomes of the NTI process, their responses were summarized into the following categories and subcategories:

• Teamwork/Perspectives/Feedback;
• Known expectations;
• Time management; and
• Cost.

It must be noted that the responses of the administrators to this question generally took the form of suggestions for improvement rather than dissatisfaction with the NTI process or program. Responses relating to the first item of teamwork and the perspective and feedback that are generated from a team-based approach centered on the lack of the ability to find an appropriate content mentor to work with the new teacher, and the need to bring content mentors from other schools in order to provide a more comprehensive opportunity for the input of different perspectives and feedback considered beneficial to the new teacher. However, recommendations that emerge from the data would be to provide additional support in identifying and filling the content mentor roles on the NTI team, developing a system that provides opportunities for content mentors to visit other schools perhaps on an exchange partnership approach, and finally, providing training specifically developed for the intended role of the content mentor on the NTI team.

The issue of known expectations voiced by the administrators indicated that an overwhelming amount of information is provided to a new teacher and that the initial NTI workshop may actually contribute to a new teacher's anxiety concerning what she or he must or need to do or at least be aware of regarding established teacher expectations. So, although the NTI appears to help address this issue of how to meet the known expectations of the new teacher, this effort may

also be causing some friction. A proposed solution would be to allow administrators or mentors control over some information that could be provided by them at a later date in the new teacher's first year.

The item of cost related to the expense of individual technology centers paying for the NTI program and time management referred to providing scheduling reminders by the higher education representative to NTI team participants throughout the process. The cost issue is not easily addressed or resolved unless perhaps the NIT program was free to all participants while a strategy to provide additional communication to NTI team members could easily be adopted.

Regarding the description by administrators of the positive aspects of the NTI, four 5-point, Likert-type questions concerning the benefits of the NTI program responded to by 01 participants directly related to the interview questions asked of the 02 and 05 survey respondents and will be incorporated in the discussion of this item. These are:

1 = This characteristic of the program was not beneficial in any way.
2 = This characteristic of the program was below average and helpful, but only in a limited way.
3 = This characteristic of the program was of average quality, helpful, and of benefit.
4 = This characteristic of the program was of great benefit, helpfulness and support.
5 = This characteristic of the program was excellent and extremely helpful.

The mean response will be provided when applicable. A mean of 4.19 was achieved concerning 01 administrators' overall perceptions of the benefits of the NTI, while the interview data addressing the positive aspects of the NTI focused in two principle areas:

• Higher education/university representative NTI team member participation and, mentor support and relationship to the new teacher; and
• Teamwork/Perspectives/Feedback.

An overwhelming number of administrators' responses supported the higher education or university representatives' participation in the NTI process as well as on individual NTI teams as a truly beneficial and positive aspect of the NTI program. The amount of time spent on-site observing new teachers, the personal attention given to new teachers, the ability of the university representative to assist in working out difficult situations or to provide unity in the NTI team, and the dedication and commitment of this person were positive dimensions that contributed to this category. The contribution of the mentor teachers was also placed in this category in that their commitment to the new teacher was a notable benefit

in the NTI program. Both the university representative and mentor relationships were regarded as providing the positive connections that addressed the feelings of isolation often experienced by the new teacher. Several administrators attributed the retention of the new teacher to be directly related to a mentor teacher working closely with the new teacher, and, without question, the experiences and perspective of the mentor teacher could be considered to be a welcome resource to the beginning teacher. In addition, the 01 survey participants indicated that having the university representative in the NTI program was a great benefit with a mean of 4.30, and subsequently the benefit of the mentor teacher was a mean of 4.40 (i.e., this characteristic of the program was of great benefit, helpfulness, and support).

Concerning the category of teamwork, perspectives, and feedback, administrators indicated that new teachers, because of the NTI team, are able to get experiences and reflection from the mentor teacher, the program administrator, other coworkers, and the university representative. Some indicated that this was one of the program's strongest points. The NTI program, perhaps unlike other previous methods, utilizes a systematic approach for providing support for the new teacher involving a wealth of experience represented by the people assigned to the NTI team. One administrator also indicated that they believed that the mentor teachers benefited from their participation along with those benefits that accrued to the new teachers. Finally, the 01 survey participants revealed in their responses to the Likert questions that the characteristic the induction team meetings were of great benefit, helpfulness, and support through a mean of 4.00.

In attempting to provide additional analysis toward understanding the data collected concerning the NTI program in relation to the eight focus questions, a rank order of frequency of response by both number of individual administrator responses and the numbers of times a single administrator vocalized the issue was determined and represented as:

1. Teamwork/Perspectives/Feedback;
2. Needs and Known Expectations;
3. Communication; and
4. University/Higher Education Representative.

This is to say that administrators viewed the aspect of teamwork and the perspectives and feedback solicited through the NTI team members, especially those of the university representative and the content mentor, as the most important aspect of the NTI program. New teacher needs and their awareness of the expectations of their position also are prevalent in their responses to the focus questions. However, it is without question that the role and participation of the university representative and the mentor teacher, including the relationships that are fostered

with the new teacher because of their participation on the NTI team, is the single largest positively referenced facet of the NTI program. So, while the teamwork approach in the NTI program that ultimately provides the new teacher with the perspectives and feedback also deemed beneficial is important, it is the composition of the team that is the critical component of the team-based approach.

Selection of the content mentor and the commitment of the university representative appear, in the perceptions of the administrators involved in this study, to be the difference between the NTI program and other team-based approaches such as the statewide Department of Education's New Teacher Residency program. Additionally, administrator responses seem to support the conclusion that it is the process related to the functions of the NTI team for each new teacher rather than any single component that makes the NTI program successful and beneficial. For example, the team-based approach provides the opportunity for open lines of communication from several sources, including a content mentor and a higher education representative, to allow for a diverse exchange of both organizational and teaching expectations from various perspectives and viewpoints. It also appears that this interactive approach is sensitive to understanding and responding to the unique demands, circumstances, and needs experienced by individual new teachers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Perhaps one of the best conclusions that can be drawn from this research and similar studies conducted on the NTI program is that it counters the widely-held belief, so boldly and precisely articulated by Bolman and Deal (1997), that "Cynics offer a range of jaundiced perspectives on committees as 'a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured and then quietly strangled'" or "a group of the unwilling, chosen by the unfit, to do the unnecessary" (p. 151). The perceptions articulated by the administrators about the NTI purpose, process, and outcomes seem to dispel what many would most likely readily admit as their view of committees and yet most often never articulate.

Reflection upon the research data over the last 8 years as well as scholars in the field has led to some changes in the format of the induction process. These are:

1. The calling to teach or mission to help others is predominately the reason many individuals begin a teaching career. This is noticeable in all of the team members who often sacrifice personal time and resources to assist the new teacher. The administrator's philosophy is communicated to the faculty and a sense of "all of us being in this together" prevails. One of the changes that has been made as a result of this reflection is to provide numerous ways in which the team members are recognized for their efforts, such as an electronic monthly newsletter that provides helpful information as well

as highlighting successes of the participants and weekly teaching tips. Small tokens of appreciation, such as framed pictures of the team members, personalized certificates, and frequent e-mails, are used to help support all members of the team including the administrators. The administrators do not receive any additional compensation for their efforts and a conscious effort has been made to find intrinsic ways to recognize and support their efforts.

2. The New Teacher Institute has been radically changed from a 5-day marathon workshop to a divided model. Rather than receiving all of the information at once in a week-long session, new teachers now attend an initial 2-day institute in July or in September (i.e., if hired after the July institute) that is followed by a one day follow up in the fall. In the spring semester, 2 half-day sessions are held at regional locations across the state that reduce the time spent away from the classroom by the new teacher for travel and attendance. The administrators first suggested such a format and all partners have found this change far more effective. The new teachers receive the same information but it is divided out over time, which allows for more reflection and practice.

3. Some disconnect between administrators participating directly in the process, and those at the top tier of administration, has always been a concern. The administrator who is directly working with the teacher has more first-hand knowledge of the challenges of the process while the top administrator may only see the cost to the school and less of the day-to-day implementation challenges. The researchers are now providing more frequent communication with *all* levels of administration and include all levels of administrators in yearly reports and monthly updates. This includes a final year-end report that is voluntary on the part of the researcher and includes the dates/times/mileage of all visits made to the school.

4. The teacher certification courses taken by the new teacher, beginning the year immediately after the induction process, have continued to be refined and adjusted to best meet the needs of the new teachers. More emphasis on time and stress management and legal issues that face the new teacher has been made. Class assignments that require new teachers to observe other teachers, to interview their colleagues about pressing issues in the field, and forming strong networks and connections have improved these courses and added relevance. Frequently, the researchers share with the administrators the course syllabi and assignments that are being made in order to check for relevance and meaning. Also, practicing mentors and administrators serve as guest speakers. Sections on mentoring, coaching, providing feedback, and questioning techniques have been strengthened.

5. Issues with paperwork and scheduling continue to arise in the busy world of education, but electronic means of communication seem to be easing this challenge. All forms needed by the administrator are now provided as a hard copy form in an administrator's notebook as well as being available

electronically. Also, field representatives and researchers use cell phones as an additional method to be in touch more frequently.

6. As new administrators enter the system, there is always the need to provide in-service to them about the process. It has been helpful to informally pair a new administrator with one who has experience to help navigate the system. Administrators and mentors are now required to attend a training session or update every 2 to 3 years has helped immensely. One administrator informally commented to the researcher that each time he attends (having now attended four times), he learns something new to help his new teachers.

7. Lifelong friendships form over the process, and it is heartening to both the administrators and the researcher to see some of the new teachers who participated in the first year now being a mentor to a new teacher. This cycle hopefully will continue to flourish and bring personal and professional satisfaction to the researcher and the administrator.

Hence, the strengths of the NTI program are its systematic year-long approach, its committed participants, and its focus on the retention of the new teachers by meeting their needs rather than meeting the legal requirements of supervision or observation of teaching during the critical first-year experience. In consideration of the issues of selection of the content mentors and their ability to visit other schools within Oklahoma's technical center system, shifting some of the procedural information delivery to the administrator or the content mentor rather than in the new teacher workshop, and a heightened awareness that cost and financial expenditures are part of any administrators job, the NTI program can continue to provide a welcomed resource to the administrators of schools participating in the program.

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Acknowledgments

About the Authors

Brian Sandford is a tenured assistant professor at Pittsburg State University teaching courses for the baccalaureate and master's degrees in the Technical Teacher Education program. He is chairman of the Graduate Council and the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee for the university. His research interests include the professional development of part-time community college faculty and the factors related to the retention of career and technical educators in the state of Kansas. Within the past 3 years his scholarly production has included: multiple entries in the recently published 3-volume *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, Neil J. Salkind, editor (Sage Publications, Inc.) and articles in both the *Journal of Career and Technical Education* (JCTE) and the *Career and Technical Education Research Journal* (CTER). He has also co-authored a chapter for the soon-to-be-published book, *Online Research: Methods in Urban and Planning Studies*, Carlos Nunes Silva, editor. He may be reached via e-mail at: bsandfor@pittstate.edu

Mary Jo Self is an associate professor of Occupational Education Studies in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University and has served continuously since 2000 as the Principal Investigator and Coordinator of the Teacher Induction process in Oklahoma and provided the substantive recommendations for this research. Her area of specialization includes preparation and professional development of CTE instructors. Courses include instructional procedures, coordination of CTSOs, curriculum design, and foundations of teaching. Her research interests include teacher induction and retention, career stages of teachers, and mentoring. She is the recipient of OSU Regents Teaching Award, a Trustee of the Association for sTEm Teacher Education, and a Board of Examiner Member, Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. She may be reached via e-mail at: maryjo.self@okstate.edu