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Principals Helping New Teachers Succeed through Collaborative Induction and Mentoring

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Schools reflect the complexity and uncertainties experienced by our changing society. Teaching, never considered an easy profession, is experiencing growing pains of its own. Traditional issues surrounding the orientation of novices into the profession and a new school still exist. New teaching professionals currently face issues that reflect our times such as increased diversity in the student population and stricter accountability and professional requirements. The diversity issue is illustrated by Cunningham and Cordiero (2006) who predict that by the middle of the 21st century more than half of the U.S. population will fall into a category other than white. This issue is compounded when one compares the fact that while our nation's classrooms are becoming more diverse, the demographic profile of K-12 teachers remains homogenous (Valli, 1996). In addition to diversity issues related to a broader racial and ethnic mix of students, our schools are dealing with other major student conditions. Some student conditions that new teachers face include poverty, homelessness, single parent families, drugs, violence, and increased incidence of mental illness in their students.

Another issue that today's new teachers face relates to current state and federal (NCLB) reform efforts that are forcing schools to address the historical realities of low student outcomes through the implementation of curriculum standards and high stakes testing. The professional lives and roles of teachers are rapidly changing as they struggle with the concepts of adequate yearly progress and becoming highly qualified.

Given these issues along with typical concerns such as classroom management, planning and organizing instruction, motivating and evaluating students, and using effective teaching strategies (Gordon & Maxey, 2000), it is no surprise that high rates of attrition among beginning teachers continues to be a problem. According to Hoerr

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(2005), 25 percent of new teachers will leave the profession within four years. Ingersoll (as cited in Zumwalt and Craig, 2005) noted that retaining teachers is a function of organizational conditions and that the solution to the “revolving door” does not only lie in recruitment, but also in the retention of newer faculty. Strong leadership is needed more than ever in guiding new teachers to develop requisite skills and strategies that promote the learning of all students. However, the lack of administrative support has been cited as another factor contributing to the level of teacher dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 1999).

The real key to the problem of teacher attrition lies in the ability of a school to provide ongoing support, assistance, and training to new teachers. Induction programs with an especially well-designed mentoring component have been shown to raise retention rates for new teachers by improving their attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills (Darling-Hammond, 2003). However, traditional mentoring comprised of the “buddy system” of novice and experienced teachers may also have harmful results (Head, Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1992). The emerging trend in induction programs is toward a more collective process, where there is a shared responsibility by all experienced teachers in the school and a more involved role for the principal (Breux & Wong, 2003; Glatthorn, Jones & Bullock, 2006). Therefore, a model of collaborative induction that utilizes one-to-one mentoring and group processes may be more productive in the socialization of new teachers into the profession and into their schools. Table 1 provides an overview of roles assumed by the new teacher, the assigned mentor, the school team, and the principal.

Table 1. Member roles in a model of collaborative induction designed as a unified system to support the professional and personal growth of new teachers.

New Teacher: New to the profession, the school, or teaching assignment	Assigned Mentor: Experienced teacher on staff	Collective Support: Grade or subject level team	Principal
Building knowledge of students and teaching, constructing personal identity as a teacher, developing standard procedural routines for class management and effective instruction, developing toward productive membership in the school organization and the profession.	Supporting authentic practices through a variety of rich opportunities for new teachers to build a context for understanding and facilitating the complex relationship between teaching and learning as directed by federal and state Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) guidelines and district goals.	Engaging in a differentiated model of teacher development including classroom and school-wide program improvement, curriculum and assessment development, and instructional planning and improvement.	Providing the connection between teacher preparation and the educational context that includes how classroom practices interact with district/school mission and goals, the conditions and dynamics of a diverse community, and the global issues, forces, and policies affecting teaching and learning.

Adapted from Varrati, LaVine & Turner, 2007

By defining clear and supportive roles, a true community of practice can be realized. In such a community, the professional growth of each member, including the new teacher, is viewed as an important instructional leadership responsibility of the principal. Developmental and differentiated supervision promotes the use of a variety of professional growth activities from directive supervisory approaches to group processes (Glatthorn, 1997; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2007; Nolan & Hoover, 2004). These supervisory models are designed so principals can give needed one-to-one attention to the most inexperienced and needy teachers, which generally includes the novice. By taking an active role in their professional growth beginning with induction, principals provide the early administrative support that is so important to new teachers (Wong, 2004). The following 10 responsibilities further define the principal’s role in the induction process by describing how they can be assumed to compliment the roles of the assigned mentor and school-based team.

1. The principal supervises the development and implementation of the school induction program. To be truly comprehensive, school induction should be based on the district’s program. Today, many district programs include NCLB requirements for HQT. Principals should be careful not to make HQT and state requirements for licensing and recertification the sole focus of induction and mentoring. Induction programs should also align new teacher needs with current school mission and goals. In addition to incorporating federal, district, and school goals into the development of new teachers, principals must be knowledgeable about some basic principals of successful induction programs including, design, implementation, and evaluation. Because educational leadership programs have not traditionally focused on new teacher support strategies, principals will need to develop networks and resources to add to their knowledge base in this

area.

2. The principal plans on-going training for mentors and teams. The focus is on a model of collaborative induction. Therefore, staff training will be different from traditional programs which are usually focused on orientation activities and low-intensity paired mentoring. Training for mentors should be geared more toward high-intensity support strategies (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000) such as observation techniques, adult/teacher learning and development, cognitive coaching, and techniques to promote reflective practice. Mentor training should be viewed as ongoing so mentors can address specific and individual needs required by their mentees. This is especially true of districts that extend the traditional entry-year induction model to subsequent years. The collaborative model might incorporate the Active Team/Active Mentor philosophy. This model advocates the work of team and mentor to cooperatively improve the school and develop the new teacher (Glatthorn, Jones, & Bullock, 2006). Training for this model can focus on group processes such as action research, peer coaching, critical friends, or study circles. Group processes are employed by grade and subject level teams engaged in real work related to curriculum and assessment, instructional improvement, and classroom management. Leadership from the principal helps define targeted goals and facilitates required training to develop the strategies to accomplish goals.

3. The principal takes part in mentor training. This is a critical starting point in identifying the principal's role in collaborative induction. Participating in mentor training sows the seeds for a more positive relationship as teachers identify the principal as a key figure for support and guidance at all stages of development. Ganser (2002) maintains that participating in training helps principals gain insights into the knowledge and skills necessary for mentoring new teachers and what effective mentors "should know and be able to do." Actively engaging in mentor training shows strong support for the program. It should also serve to enlighten principals about how to best support mentors in terms of time, resources, and scheduling during the mentoring assignment.

The collaborative or "team" aspect of this model requires the principal's participation for delineation and training of the supervisory and evaluation aspects involved in working with new teachers. Supervision and evaluation represent two sides of the same coin. Both are functions that should be used to support professional growth in all teachers regardless of experience. Evaluation, a legal function to determine teacher competency for continued employment, should be conducted by trained personnel with line authority. Effective supervision should provide focus to teachers on individual professional growth issues in a risk-free environment. Anyone can supervise if they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise to assist a colleague needing improvement. Collaborative induction and mentoring will increase the capacity to provide proper assistance in any situation because you are relying on the collective expertise of your entire teaching staff, including novices. Training should address the supervisory processes that will be employed by mentors and peers. During the induction process, supervision can be conducted by trained peers (mentors and a team) with the principal becoming involved when necessary.

Regarding the assessment of new teacher performance during induction, districts may want to look at differentiated evaluation. According to Danielson & McGreal (2000), differentiated evaluation has established expectations and procedures for new, experienced, and marginal teachers. This evaluation model recognizes that beginning teachers are not expected to perform at the same level as someone with more experience. In some districts, the beginning teacher track lasts from three to five years with ascending expectations. Districts would need to define the progressive performance standards along with acceptable evidence for meeting them. A differentiated evaluation model would force districts to define explicit roles and responsibilities for principals and the collaborative team and would impact training and support for professional growth for teachers at all experience levels.

4. The principal assigns the mentor. There has been much written about the selection process as the mentoring relationship seems to form the backbone of most induction programs. However, principals should carefully evaluate the needs of the new teacher and make the selection based on those needs. The selection of a mentor becomes an individualized event for every new teacher and moves away from relying on the same cadre of mentors year after year. Using an inclusive approach offers all veteran teachers the opportunity to be mentors (Podsen & Denmark, 2007). An effective pairing at the very least should match the subject area and grade level of the mentee with a master teacher. Such a match strengthens the quality of support provided by the mentor and also the school team because of the commonalities with students and instructional goals. In order to be sure that each mentee is receiving high quality support, all of the mentors should possess, communicate, and model knowledge of 1) instructional planning, teaching, and assessment, 2) classroom management strategies, and 3) approaches to handling a variety of students and student needs.

5. The principal introduces new teachers to entire school staff. Orientation and induction into their new school also serves as the initial socialization into the profession of teaching. Interviews with novice teachers revealed that they often worked in isolation, were faced with multiple academic preparations, or were left to "sink or swim" without any organized support from colleagues or administrators (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; McCaughtry, Cothran, Kulinna, Martin & Faust, 2005). While new teachers' formal daily interactions will be with their grade or subject area peers, one can not

underestimate the influence of the entire school organization. Organizational socialization is the “process by which educators learn the knowledge, values, and skills required by the work organizations” (Lawson, 1988, p. 267). Providing the right vision is critical to establishing a supportive collaborative culture focused on high expectations for teaching and learning. Principals must be purposeful about communicating this vision and how they provide the environment that promotes staff acceptance. Making new teachers feel like a part of their “community of practice” needs to happen the first day that the staff is in the school. An initial meeting or social gathering of all staff stresses the role of the entire organization in the induction process in relationship to the overall school vision, mission, and goals.

6. The principal provides a supportive induction environment. For this model to be successful, the principal must provide for a supportive environment so that paired mentoring and team activities can flourish. For mentoring, the principal needs to ensure that the pair has regular, structured time for interaction which may mean adjusting work conditions for both mentor and mentee. The mentor should have release time to be able to conduct high intensity support activities such as coaching and classroom observations. The mentee should be given a schedule that features a student-teacher ratio on the lower end, fewer course preparations, and a minimum of extra-curricular assignments. Principals should also refrain from assigning new teachers to the most challenging of students. Since studies have shown that the single most contributing factor to student achievement is the classroom teacher (Hensen, 2006), students needing the most help should have the most experienced teachers. Doing away with the “rights of passage” mentality where seniority is rewarded will ultimately have positive effects on student learning and new teacher retention.

Professional development activities should stay focused on differentiated standards and practices for new teachers in order to help them build important skills. Grade and subject level team activities to promote new teacher development aligned with specific school goals include curriculum and instructional planning. The principal must ensure that there is adequate time and resources for teams to develop and work toward their respective goals.

7. The principal schedules periodic meetings with new teachers to address timely topics. Topics can include sharing the school mission, vision, and goals. According to Daresh (2006), principals must understand the impact of their own value orientation in relationship to the school vision. This opportunity to engage new teachers communicates what the leader truly values and increases the likelihood that they will be swayed to perform stated goals and objectives.

One topic mentioned in the introduction, diversity, can be addressed by acquainting new teachers with the student population and demographics. Various community characteristics such as language, culture, and socio-economic status, are shared by the principal to help new teachers understand how they impact instructional planning. Through the principal’s broad lens, the teacher can better understand the connection between the student population and school-wide instructional planning.

While mentors may address these issues, most teachers will do so from a classroom perspective. The principal can provide the big picture of how classroom instruction and activities relate to school and district goals. The principal is also in a better position to stress the importance of the school as a community of learners that includes staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders. Topics should be timely and instructive and should serve to instill the spirit of teaching and learning as a collaborative endeavor with the principal as the lead learner.

8. The principal makes periodic visits to classrooms. According to Blase and Blase (2004), principals who make unannounced classroom visits enhance teachers’ motivation, self esteem, sense of security, and morale. Effective principals also use such visits as another way to monitor instruction and provide helpful, critical feedback to teachers from a more global perspective. Early exposure to this informal interaction between principals and teachers can lessen the anxiety new teachers feel about supervisor expectations.

9. The principal observes a lesson and gives feedback. Teacher observation is an expected responsibility of the principal. This observer role is designed as second chair to the mentor in order to offer differing viewpoints of classroom activities. Whether done formally or informally, the principal’s perspective should help new teachers see lessons within the context of the school and district curriculum and instructional program that peers may not possess. As an experienced observer of teachers, and with a unique knowledge of a wide variety of school-based factors, the principal makes a valuable contribution to the new teacher (Vann, 1989). This perspective is even more appropriate within the current climate of school reform because what happens in a single classroom is no longer viewed in isolation.

10. The principal meets periodically with mentors. Being open and available to the mentors makes the collaborative induction process a positive and beneficial experience for everyone. The principal can also serve as a conduit for mentors to collaborate with one another. This interaction enables the mentors to coordinate activities where the team and principal can be engaged. For the collaborative model of induction to work, it is important for everyone to know and understand their roles. Good coordination paves the way for all teachers to identify the role that the principal fulfills as an active instructional leader for new teacher development.

Conclusion

Varrati, LaVine, & Turner (2007) examined principal interaction with preservice teachers during clinical experiences. The results of that study indicated that while principals saw the importance in positively interacting with preservice teachers, they had a difficult time putting their intentions into practice. Three major barriers became evident: the demands and different constraints that go along with the principalship, time to be able to give preservice teacher education sufficient attention, and prioritization of demands and time in order to become fully engaged. However, the overarching barrier, one which principals did not directly address in their interviews, was that there appeared to be no formal expectations regarding the principal's role in teacher education. There existed little research to provide models of principal participation in teacher education. Similarly, little research exists on the principal's role in induction. If questioned, principals would likely indicate similar barriers to more active participation in programs for new teachers. In addition, the content of educational leadership programs sets no solid expectations for principal interaction with new teachers.

In order to see the implementation of collaborative induction there is a need to address perceived and actual barriers to principal participation. By defining clear and supportive roles and responsibilities for the new teacher, assigned mentor, school team, and school principal, a true community of practice can be realized. In such a community, the professional growth of each member, including the new teacher, is viewed as an important instructional leadership responsibility of the principal. If lack of adequate support from the school administrator has been indicated as a reason why novices leave the profession early (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) then central to this discussion is how we prepare, orient, and socialize novices into our teaching profession and how the principal is involved. To build upon current research and continue the discourse about the principal's role several implications for future study are presented. One area is to study induction programs more in depth to get further information about how principals are involved. Studies of the implementation of this collaborative model of new teacher induction would provide a means to gather more data about collaboration. Data and perceptions from the field about the contribution of each role, especially the role of the principal, may provide more examples of effective practice in new teacher development. Finally, educational leadership programs need to be studied to see if and how they address the principal's role with new teachers to provide expectations and strategies for application.

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