

FACTORS THAT MAKE A TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM
EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING TEACHER RETENTION:
GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING INDUCTION PROGRAMS OF THREE SCHOOL
DISTRICTS

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ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
Sylvia Egal

Submitted

Date _____

Student's Signature

Date _____

Mentor's Signature

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine several significant factors in effective teacher induction programs that improve teacher retention and use them as guidelines in evaluating the induction programs of three Long Island suburban school districts for teacher retention.

Background

The transition from being a student teacher to becoming a teacher of students is a major undertaking. Watkins (2005) states that the average yearly turnover rate in education is 13.2 percent compared to 11 percent in other professions. Hope (1999) cites reports showing that one-third to one-half of all new teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years. Other research shows that in some districts up to 40% of new teachers resign during their first two years. With this high attrition rate, it is understandable that teaching is characterized as a profession that “eats its young” (Weiss, 1999).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) state: “Teaching has long had alarmingly high rates of attrition among newcomers” (p.29). Analyses of national data show that teacher shortages are not primarily due to teachers shortages based on recruitment and training, but rather to a significant extent are the result of large numbers of teachers leaving the profession long before retirement (Ingersoll and Smith, 2004).

Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, and Donaldson (2004) have provided evidence that new teachers start their profession with a tentative commitment to teaching and

decide whether to remain based on the support they receive and the success they experience with their students. Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) report:

Although elementary and secondary teaching involves intensive interaction with youngsters, the work of teachers is largely done in isolation from colleagues. This can be especially difficult for new entrants who, upon accepting a teaching position in a school, are often left on their own to succeed or fail within the confines of their own classrooms...(p. 2)

Novice teachers share a need for support, acceptance, and belonging; otherwise, they can easily become disconnected and isolated and part of the high attrition rates associated with the teaching profession that school leaders must deal with, which adversely affect schools as learning communities (Watkins, 2005). Therefore, the effectiveness of induction programs in reducing new teacher attrition and improving teacher quality have become the basis of much interest and research. (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Hill and Barth (2004) point out that teaching is one of the few professions that requires beginners to meet the same standards and demands as their experienced colleagues. Without the practice and experience to deal with teaching strategies, classroom routines and management, accountability, paperwork, and administrative and parental expectations; new teachers are vulnerable to attrition. Darling-Hammond (2003) cites evidence that teacher effectiveness increases greatly after the first few years of teaching. Therefore, the loss of new teachers decreases performance productivity and learning for the school as a community.

Teachers leaving the profession early also cause tremendous burdens on district budgets. High attrition means that funds, which could be used for school improvements,

must be spent on recruiting and hiring teachers to replace those who leave. In addition to finding replacements, school district personnel must use their resources to make certain that the new recruits receive professional development (Kajs, 2002). Furthermore, constant teacher turnover can have negative effects on curriculum improvement and student achievement (p. 58).

As school districts struggle to deal with the ramifications of teacher attrition, they must also deal with the continuous need to replace teaching staff which can result in the hiring of teachers who are inexperienced, unlicensed and unprepared to deal with the diverse cultural, personal, and academic needs of students (Stanulis, Fallona & Pearson, 2002). Moreover, the student population is expected to continue to increase, resulting in the need for an increased number of teachers (Woullard & Coats, p.10).

The widespread concern with quality education and teacher retention have led to a growth in support and orientation programs, generally referred to as induction programs for new teachers. These induction programs are intended to address the problems that adversely affect teacher retention and to provide ongoing assistance to new teachers to help them meet the challenges of their first full-time teaching assignments.

Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) have reviewed many induction programs and found that the structures and designs of these programs vary greatly according to the different types of activities and the importance and priority that the school district places on assisting new teachers in their communities. Ingersoll & Smith (2004) state:

“This research has shown that duration and intensity are important sources of variation: Induction programs can vary from a single orientation meeting at the beginning of a school year to a highly structured program involving multiple activities and frequent meetings over a period of several years” (p. 683)

Some induction programs are based solely on mentoring, which can be very informal or formal in structure and implementation, while other programs include activities such as orientation, professional development, and support systems. While programs exist which have detailed guidelines, there are other programs with very few guidelines or stipulations in place to determine the elements, best practices and implementation to use and to assess program effectiveness. According to Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) "...some programs might even tend to stifle innovation or the implementation of new approaches on the part of beginning teachers" (p. 3).

For leaders in education to be successful in developing and retaining quality teachers, they must focus on developing and supporting effective induction programs; otherwise, school administrators will have to continue to address the issues of teacher retention and quality and the problems that result from them.

Significance of Study

According to research findings by Howe (2006), understanding how an induction program works can lead to increasing its capacity to improve new teacher retention and professional effectiveness. This study uses the factors identified in effective teacher induction programs as guidelines to evaluate the induction programs of three Long Island suburban school districts in promoting and supporting teacher retention. Research has showed that these factors can lead to positive teacher attitude, teacher collegiality, teacher efficacy, and foster the growth of teacher and student learning and success. Results from this case study may help school districts make knowledgeable decisions on the component and assessment criteria of their induction programs to ensure that they meet the needs of their teachers and help promote affirmative changes in teachers as learners as

well as professionals. The data can also provide suggestions for school districts to consider for evaluating a program's effectiveness as well as its effect on developing the school as a community that promotes and supports participant learning and student success.

Research Questions

As school districts implement educational reforms in response to local, state and national needs, educators need to develop programs that help their new teachers adjust to the realities of classroom teaching if they are to decrease new teacher attrition.

The following questions guide this study on evaluating the effectiveness of induction programs in supporting teacher retention in three school districts:

1. What is the purpose of the new teacher induction program?
2. What is the design of the induction program and how are the professional staff participants trained and evaluated?
3. How are new teachers assessed for growth and improvement in the induction program?
4. How is the induction program evaluated for its effectiveness in improving teacher retention and professional development?

Definitions of Major Terms

The following terms are significant in this study on elements characteristic to induction programs for new teachers.

Induction refers to informal or systematic programs or a variety of activities that provide orientation, guidance and support for beginning teachers during their transition into their

first teaching jobs. This definition is stated by Smith & Ingersoll (2004) in their research on induction programs.

New or Novice Teacher refers to teachers teaching full-time during the first three years of their teaching career. This term is used interchangeably with the term beginning teacher as well.

Teacher Attrition refers to teachers leaving the teaching profession. For the purposes of this study, the term refers to departure from the profession during the first five years of the teaching career as described by Hope (1999) in his studies on teacher attrition.

Teacher Retention describes the annual return of a highly qualified classroom teacher to a school setting as a regular full-time classroom teacher or to the teaching profession as a full-time teacher. This description is based on findings in NEA (2003).

Teacher Effectiveness is the accomplishment of intended outcomes as a result of performance as defined by Debolt (1992) in studies on induction.

Mentoring in this study is based on the definition given by Schlichte, Yssel and Merbler (2005), which states: “The effective mentor nurtures and acts as a role model who reflects the five mentoring functions of teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending” (p.2).

Mentee refers to the new teacher receiving the guidance, help and support of the mentor in the mentor-mentee relationship.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to induction programs in three Long Island suburban school districts that were chosen due to their demographic similarities. The variables that were used to select the participating school districts were student enrollment, teacher-student

ratio, teacher turnover rate, median years of teaching experience, percentage of highly qualified teachers teaching in their subject area, percentage of teachers with masters and 30 above or doctoral degrees, and percentages of student dropouts and students going to college.

The findings may not be applicable to school districts that do not have similar demographic features or are located in urban or rural settings. In addition, the age, gender, and nationality of district program administrators are treated as extraneous variables in this study to avoid excluding any program administrators.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of building schools as communities of learning by Sergiovanni (1996) is based on inquiry, caring, and mutual respect, civic responsibility and shared purposes. This theory provides the theoretical framework for this study by examining teacher induction programs as learning communities. Sergiovanni's theory expands that of constructivist principles, which "point to how adults learn. And for this reason they are helpful in sorting out issues of collegiality, action research, and teacher development as well as issues of teaching and learning for children" (p.39).

Sergiovanni explains how schools grow into communities of understandings through questioning and through sharing of time and place. This sharing creates a sense of identity and belonging, establishing relationships based on common goals; and shared values and conceptions of being and doing. The result is a moral community based on shared agreements and morality being the basis for what people do. In such a community, new teachers want to belong, contribute and feel that they are a part of the school culture. Therefore, new teachers cannot be left in a vacuum and instead must be allowed to participate in a professional community in order to become effective in working with students and adopting teaching strategies (Howe, 2006).

In the learning community, it is the role of school leaders to facilitate, nurture, share, model and support learning. If the school as a community is willing to accept and value the new teachers and their perspectives and contributions, then they can develop into participants and learners working toward common goals based on their shared experiences and results. Sergiovanni states: (2006), "Effective training programs provide

opportunities for teachers to practice what they learn and then receive coaching as they actually begin to use the new material in their classrooms” (p. 143).

Sergiovanni identifies the following principles as requisites for learning to occur:

“Learning requires involvement and reflection, the identification of learning needs and interests determine the structure and content of the learning and should precede the development of any learning program; learning takes place in a community; and learning is a perpetual movement of discovery and invention” (p.150-151).

Furthermore, Sergiovanni emphasizes that these same principles of the theory of a school as a learning community can be applied to design teacher development programs as well as to the environment, structures and resources to help the teacher.

Recent reforms in educational standards call for school leaders and teachers alike to be change agents as well as reflective, collaborative and lifelong learners. They are expected to be student-focused and able to adapt and revise whenever indicated by ongoing assessment of the needs and objectives of the learning community. Such requirements, as supported by Sergiovanni’s theory, demand that both school leaders and teachers promote ongoing learning, which is encouraged, facilitated and sustained in a school that is a community of learning. Fullan (2001, as cited in Wong, 2004) emphasizes “sustained success is never just one event, meeting or activity; rather it is a journey of recursive decisions and actions.”

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purpose

This qualitative study focuses on using elements of effective induction programs as guidelines to evaluate induction programs of three school districts for teacher retention.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study to gain understanding about factors that make induction programs effective in improving teacher retention and professionalism:

1. What is the purpose of the new teacher induction program?
2. What is the design of the induction program and how are the professional staff participants trained and evaluated?
3. How are new teachers assessed for growth and improvement in the induction program?
4. How is the induction program evaluated for its effectiveness in improving teacher retention and professional development?

Setting

The three suburban school districts selected for this study are located in Nassau County, Long Island. Nassau County is situated east of New York City and is composed of mostly small towns and villages formed from suburban residential communities. Three school districts, Manhasset, North Shore, and West Hempstead, were selected based on their similar school demographics. They are similar in their student population size, teaching population, and the number of schools they have on

each level. For the school year 2002-2003, according to district report card data reported to the New York State Education Department, West Hempstead had a teaching staff of 192 teachers while North Shore had 253 teachers; and Manhasset had 243 teachers (NYSED, 2004). Manhasset school district consists of two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. North Shore school district has three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. West Hempstead school district is composed of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The variables that were considered for similarity in this study are the following with more detailed information displayed in Chart 1: Student enrollment, teacher-student ratio, teacher turnover rate, percentage of highly qualified teachers teaching in their subject area, median years of teaching experience, percentage of teachers with masters degree plus 30 or above, percentage of high school dropouts; and percentage of students going to college.

Chart 1: **Demographics of Three Long Island School Districts**

Demographic Factors	Manhasset	North Shore	West Hempstead
Student Enrollment	2429	2557	2328
Median Years of Teaching Experience	20	18	18
% with Masters and 30 or Above	54	47	50
% Highly Certified and Teaching in Subject Area*	100	98	96
Teacher/Student Ratio	12.5	12.4	13.0
% Teacher Annual Turnover	9	8	12
% Student Dropout Rate	0.1	1.1	0.5
% Students to College	94.7	98.1	96.7

Source: Hughes, J. T., 2004. SCOPE: Long Island School District Almanac: Nassau County: 2004.

*New York State Education Department School Report Cards: 2002-2003.

Data Collection

A review of literature on teacher induction programs to improve teacher retention will be conducted to identify elements common to these programs. The findings form the criteria for elements composing effective induction programs. These criteria will be the basis for research in this qualitative study. Information will be obtained by reviewing documents, handbooks, brochures and other artifacts to identify, describe and explain the planning, organization, implementation, and assessment of the induction programs of the target school districts of this study. Moreover, taped open-ended interviews will be conducted using the types of information questions guiding this research. The interviews will be held with school district induction program directors and supervisors. These interviews will provide data concerning how the programs have been developed, implemented and evaluated for effectiveness.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data obtained from interviews for this study will be analyzed using Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) process of coding to discover and identify emerging themes, patterns and discrepancies that contribute to identifying factors in the induction program of each school that affect its effectiveness in teacher retention.

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