

The Induction Bridge: Linking Theory to Practice

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New teacher induction programs have become a significant issue in education reform. The transition from preparing to teach to actual teaching is an important process and a key component to teacher retention (Scherer, 1999). The first few years of teaching provide major changes where the new teacher must master a variety of pedagogical techniques including classroom management, student discipline and motivation, parent communication, the management and implementation of the curriculum, and skills of teaching to diverse learning styles (Weiss & Weiss, 1999). New teachers enter the classroom with a college education that includes supervised fieldwork. In-service training provides an additional experience for teachers to acquire the skills to meet the demands of the changing curricula and standards, but does not prepare them to meet the daily challenges of classroom teaching. New teachers may enter the profession with good teaching theory, but little practical skill (Wasley, 1999). Linking theory to practice provides the transition from learning to teach to teaching to learn. Recent literature emphasizes the need to provide professional development for new teachers that includes a combination of research, training, and practice that supports the understanding of complex subject matter and student learning styles. New teacher induction programs which foster problem solving techniques and critical thinking skills and model collegial and inquiry-based activities provide the link necessary to bridge educational theory to instructional practice.

The early years of teaching provide many challenges...difficult work assignments, unclear expectations, feelings of isolation, lack of skill, experience and content knowledge, reality shock, and more. New teacher induction programs afford teachers the opportunity to understand teaching, learning, and to experience the confidence that comes from collegial sharing and support (Hargreaves, 1994). For new teachers the induction process helps them become a part of the common culture and guides them through their professional development.

Why the sense of urgency?

- The *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* (1996) proposed that by the year 2006, all students would be provided with competent, caring, and qualified teachers...
- The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) projects the need for 2.4 million teachers within the next ten years...
- The rate of teacher attrition is reported between 35% and 50% within the first five years of teaching.

If the goal to educate America's children is core to educational reform and national mandates, then the goals and objectives of new teacher induction programs should be to provide the necessary transition to support effective professional development, that which will train and retain effective teachers.

Induction Programs

Induction programs hold the promise of shaping effective teachers. Induction programs hold the promise of providing all students with competent, caring, and qualified teachers. Induction programs hold the promise of reducing the attrition rate.

The actions of a teacher during the first few days and weeks of school will determine enduring attitudes for an entire career. Early teaching experiences shape the type of teacher that one will become (Sergiovanni, 1984). The most critical time for teachers is

their initial entry into the profession and induction programs can provide the appropriate support to cushion the transition and provide the skills necessary for survival and growth. Defining induction represents the challenge.

What is induction? Induction is a structured multi-year program that is organized by a school or district that is ongoing and sustained. It provides a culture of consistency and promotes the development of professional communities. Induction is not mentoring, but may incorporate the one-to-one concept of mentoring as a component. Induction reduces the sense of isolationism that sometimes characterizes the first few years of teaching and provides a support system for new teachers (Wong & Wong, 1998).

Islip School District's Program

The Islip School District is proud of its three-year induction program. Teachers new to the district participate in an orientation program, which occurs for three days prior to the beginning of school. Participation in monthly induction meetings is required of all probationary teachers. Induction is theme oriented and defined as ongoing professional development throughout the school year. Each year is defined by theme and by elementary and secondary levels.

Year One teachers have a three-day orientation, facilitated by the Director of Human Resources. It combines basic procedural information, introductions, a bus tour through the community, team building activities, *food*, first day advice, ice breakers, organizational strategies, meetings with Central Office Administrators, the Payroll Account Clerk, Building Principals, and the Union President. This group proceeds through their three-year tenure track program as a cohort, building relationships and support groups. They meet monthly with the Director of Human Resources and focus on *The Effective Teacher* video series by Harry Wong as jumpstart for conversation and discussion. Collegial circles are held informally in between formal monthly meetings. Additionally, workshops are given on Parent Teacher Conferencing Strategies, Open School Night suggestions, and more.

Year two teachers have a three-day orientation facilitated by the Director of Human Resources. The orientation is an introduction to Linda Albert's *Cooperative Discipline*, which becomes the focus of monthly meetings. This philosophy deals with classroom management techniques and interventions for encouraging appropriate behavior and understanding the discipline means 'to teach'. Team building activities are included as well to promote the sense of cohesion and belonging...and yes *food!*

Year three teachers have a three-day orientation facilitated by the Director of Human Resources and focuses on teachers as change agents. Spencer Johnson's, *Who Moved My Cheese?* is the springboard for the understanding of change profiles and the need to understand how the only constant in education is change. Year three teachers also meet monthly, but each meeting is shaped by a needs assessment of the staff and workshop presenters are invited to each meeting. Workshops include Cooperative Learning Strategies, Multiple Learning Styles, Stress Management, Time Management, Study Skill Techniques, Self-Esteem for Educators and more. And yes *food!*

A newsletter is distributed three times throughout the school year to new staff members. *TIPS* (Teacher Induction Program Stuff) is the newsletter which includes information about teaching

strategies, cooperative learning, district information, and highlights a new teacher each issue.

At the end of the year, after the Board of Education approves tenure for eligible teachers, a tenure celebration is held. The theme for the celebration is based on Whitney Houston's song, *I Believe the Children are the Future*. Each teacher is asked to complete an 'I Believe' statement and it with the teacher's picture is presented to the community in a multi-media presentation. As the new teachers 'graduate' into the land of the tenured, they receive a 'diploma' of the poster *The Noble Teacher! And yes there is food!*

Induction is growing and working in Islip. The goals of teacher retention and student learning have been realized. The results are evident as more teachers are staying and student achievement is up! Islip is proud of the its vision to have originated the program and proud of the response of the participants to the content. Induction is an investment in cultivating the talent of new staff members and affording them the opportunity to become the impact teachers that as Christa McAuliffe said, "will touch the future".

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Editor's Note

The theme for this issue, "initiating new teachers" is a very important one if children are to continue to have "high quality teachers". You will notice that I said "continue to have" because there are and have been many dedicated, hard-working, and effective "high quality teachers" in the profession long before the mandates of No Child Left Behind came into existence. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who responded to the call for papers. The response was heartwarming, not for the quantity, but for the number of reflections on personal experiences and dedication to helping students and new teachers that are expressed in many of them.

The first item in this volume, "Acknowledging, Nurturing, and Protecting the Teacher Within" is the keynote address that John Webb gave at the 2003 Annual Meeting with a preface added by the author. In terms of initiating new teachers to the profession and the novel idea of nurturing those who have been there for years, it is an inspiring meditation on the calling to become a teacher, the essence of being teacher, the trust that students place in teachers, and the ability that teachers can have to transform lives. Reading it provides a lift of spirit from the increased daily pressures that assail teachers, particularly in the present political climate, and helps one to reflect on acknowledging, nurturing and protecting one's own "teacher within".

The next two articles provide two perspectives on a new teacher induction program that helps to nurture and protect the "teacher within". When Mike Mitchell, a second-year Spanish teacher, sent me his reflections on his experiences as a novice teacher and described the role of the induction program in contributing to his success in his first year in the classroom, I asked his supervisor, Dr. Linda Lippman if she would also submit an article on the new teacher induction program as she sees it. Thanks to both of these individuals, we have two perspectives on one possible solution to the high attrition rate of new teachers within their first five years. In Dr. Lippman's article, the plan for supporting and valuing new teachers that is in place in Islip Schools is carefully described. Complimentarily, Mike describes his feelings as a first year teacher, and the value of this program to his formation. If your district does not have such a program, perhaps you can give a real boost to novice teachers by passing these two articles to the appropriate people and by encouraging the establishment of a similar program to support new teachers and to celebrate their success.

The next item is another speech. Yes, I asked myself if two addresses were too many in one issue, and the answer was a resounding "NO!". This address which Abbe Guillet delivered at a conference for future teachers in Cortland also tells us a lot about the "teacher within". Like John, Abbe speaks of her calling to teach that was present from childhood, and the love for her work that she continues to have after twenty-five years in the classroom. The self-assessment guidelines that she gives for becoming a teacher reflect in many ways themes that also occurred in John's address – having an impact on society and earning students' trust. If you have students who are contemplating teaching as a profession, this should be required reading for them. Both speakers clearly convey the message that teaching is not a profession that you enter because you "can't think of anything else for which your undergraduate degree qualifies you", but rather one that you enter because you have a strong calling to it and are indeed want to make a difference.

The fifth item in this issue by Jenny M. Castillo provides a rationale and outlines a set of procedures for initiating teachers in preparation to the use of technology. Those of our readers who teach methods courses, and those who are "getting their feet wet" in the use of technology in their own classrooms will find the suggestions in this article helpful.

The final two items should be helpful to all teachers placed in the position of having to defend the existence of foreign languages in their schools, districts and grade levels. The first, reprinted from NCLRC Language Resource newsletter, affirms that foreign languages ARE one of the core subjects listed but not elaborated on in No Child Left Behind. If NCLB is being used to reduce and eliminate foreign language programs, it is being misinterpreted. If you want to advocate for foreign languages but need additional support, Louise Terry and Judy Martialay Co-Chairs of the NYS AFLT Public Advocacy Committee, provide you with updated post 9/11 arguments. These are both very important articles for teachers of LOTE to read.

A Product of New Teacher Induction

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Prior to securing my first full-time teaching job, I was apprehensive about the task confronting me. My fellow classmates who had already been teaching were burdened by a LOTE department without a curriculum in place and a district lacking guidance and mentoring. As a result, they felt that the innovative theories and practices we had internalized were, for all intents and purposes, useless. Furthermore, little of what we had learned was heard of, let alone utilized in their schools.

In the winter of 2002, I was fortunate enough to be added to the more than 30 teachers hired at Islip Public Schools on Long Island, New York. During the very first interview with Dr. Linda Lippman, director of Human Resources at Islip Public Schools, my initial fears were quelled. I questioned Dr. Lippman about the kind of environment and culture Islip offered, as these issues were paramount in determining whether or not I would accept the position. To my surprise I found our meeting to be more like a conversation and less like the interview for which I had prepared. Dr. Lippman assured me that Islip would be a safe place to grow and that my learning had just begun. I was not sure what Dr. Lippman meant by that, but within my first month of working at Islip Middle School, what she said began to crystallize.

Dr. Lippman, and previously Alan Van Cott, Islip's Superintendent, began a new teacher induction program in the late 1990's. This three-year program is now a requirement of all untenured teachers in the district. New teacher inductees meet monthly with Dr. Lippman or a guest lecturer for 90 minutes after school. They are broken up into 6 groups based on experience (1st, 2nd and 3rd year) then again by grade level (K-5 and 6-12). In these groups the teachers are able to network with each other, observe model lessons, gain hands-on experience with crafts and many lesson materials, as well as apply many current educational theories to their own classrooms. In their first year, teachers are exposed to ways to overcome new teacher jitters by relying on Harry and Rosemary Wong and the teachings in their Effective Teacher video program (1996) and their book, *The First Days of School* (2001). In their second year, teachers examine ways to manage the classroom through cooperative discipline via the expertise of Linda Albert. Finally, in their third year, Islip's New Teacher Induction "seniors" explore how change is the only constant in education through Spencer Johnson's foundations on Character Education in his book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998). All groups are also exposed to guest lectures from local teachers and administrators as well as nationally acclaimed authors.

Dr. Lippman's model filters down into the individual schools, departments and teams. Currently, about 75% off the Islip faculty is a product of its New Teacher Induction Program. Teachers are relying on each other more than ever, sharing and "stealing" ideas from each other. As one walks the halls of any of Islip's schools, one will see common procedures posted in classrooms and teachers working together in the library, faculty room or even on the run in the hallways.

Having been through three days of induction prior to the beginning of the school year, my first days of school seemed to go very smoothly. I thought and planned ahead to have everything in place for my first days, including seating charts, procedures and handouts. My students finished the first week with a clear understanding of what is expected of them and I was able to finish the week rather jitter-free.

In my second year, as the induction program focuses more on cooperative discipline, my class runs like a well-oiled machine. The combination of clear procedure and a method of discipline and follow up that does not interfere with classroom management

will gradually allow a class to run with minimal behavior problems.

Currently in Islip, 6 out of 12 LOTE teachers are untenured and are enrolled in all three levels of the new teacher induction program. Next year, there will be at least 2 more inductees. An orientation and training program is needed more then ever in LOTE. Dr. Lippman's model has created a culture that naturally allows the graduates of new teacher induction to guide the new inductees. In addition to the adoption of successful curricula for Italian and Spanish in levels 1 through 3 and a more stringent advanced placement preparation program, the teachers in both the middle and high schools have created and shared their own lessons that reach across all content areas as well as reach all types of learners. The LOTE coordinator, Pauline Slowey, is very involved in checking and offering feedback on lesson plans, which are handed in a week in advance. Untenured teachers who teach the same levels are teamed up during common preparation periods to share ideas and coach each other. Mrs. Slowey claims that she can walk through our schools and see the same lessons being taught with each teacher's individual flair.

This top-down modeling approach has proven successful in many ways. It takes the pressure off of the most senior teachers in the department as well as coordinators and chair people who are usually most burdened when a new teacher is hired. It naturally allows for a more collegial atmosphere. One will find more consistency across each classroom, each team, each department and each building.

The new teacher induction program is not only beneficial to the individual teachers, but also to district administration, the community and the students. Since the induction program has been in place in Islip, the district went from losing nearly half of its newly hired staff to losing less than 5%. In ten years, the Regents Diploma rate jumped from 40% to over 70% and from 80 students in advanced placement with 50% achieving level 3 or higher to 120 students enrolled in advanced placement with 73% achieving level 3 or higher.

Being a product of The New Teacher Induction Program, I know I am a stronger teacher; I know I can reach more of my students; I know I can manage my classroom; I know I can work as a part of a team; I know I can be a part of our community; I know I can touch the life of each of my students and allow them to succeed as students and be good citizens.

A school district that does not invest in their teacher's professional development is not allowing itself to grow and not allowing its faculty and students to succeed. Dr. Lippman put it best when she said, "You are making a 30-year investment in a teacher. You want to be able to craft and shape the teacher and raise expectations. So by putting the money up front with a sustained approach, your end product is a master teacher."

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