

What the World Can Teach Us About New Teacher Induction

In the U.S., if new teachers receive any induction at all, it is typically delivered by a single mentor and is not well structured. The authors report on the much more systematic approaches to induction that five other countries have adopted.

BY HARRY K. WONG, TED BRITTON, AND TOM GANSER

AN EFFECTIVE teacher is perhaps the most important factor in producing consistently high levels of student achievement.¹ Thus the profession must see to it that teachers are continually learning throughout their careers, and that process begins with those newest to the profession. A new teacher induction program can acculturate those newcomers to the idea that professional learning must be a lifelong pursuit.

A recent book edited by Ted Britton, Lynn Paine, David Pimm, and Senta Raizen provides a more detailed look at how five countries — Switzerland, Japan, France, New Zealand, and China (Shanghai) — acculturate their new teachers, specifically their science and mathematics teachers, and shape their entry into the profession.² In this article, we share a brief summary of the findings reported in that volume.

The five countries studied provide well-funded support that reaches all beginning teachers, incorporates multiple sources of assistance, typically lasts at least two years, and goes beyond the imparting of mere survival

skills. For example, in Switzerland, new teachers are involved in practice groups, where they network to learn effective problem solving. In Shanghai, new teachers join a culture of lesson-preparation and teaching-research groups. New teachers in New Zealand take part in a 25-year-old Advice and Guidance program that extends for two years. Lesson study groups are the mode in Japan, while in France, new teachers work for an extended time with groups of peers who share experiences, practices, tools, and professional language.

Before we go into more detail about these programs, a basic definition of induction is in order. Induction is a highly organized and comprehensive form of staff development, involving many people and components, that typically continues as a sustained process for the first two to five years of a teacher's career. Mentoring is often a component of the induction process.

The exponential growth in the number of induction programs in the United States attests to the value that staff developers and other school leaders ascribe to them. Educational leaders

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have eagerly adapted their approaches to induction to reflect the many changes in the teaching profession.³ But induction programs are a global phenomenon, and here we offer U.S. leaders a summary of the best practices of the international programs reported by Britton and his colleagues.

SWITZERLAND

In the Swiss system, teachers are assumed to be lifelong learners. From the start, beginning teachers are viewed as professionals, and induction focuses on the development of the person as well as on the development of the professional.

Induction begins during student teaching as teams of three students network with one another. It continues for beginning teachers in practice groups of some half a dozen teachers and is carried forward in mutual classroom observations between beginning teachers and experienced teachers. Thus induction moves seamlessly from a teacher's preservice days to novice teaching to continuing professional learning.

The Swiss philosophy explicitly rejects a "deficit" model of induction, which assumes that new teachers lack training and competence and thus need

mentors. Instead, in several cantons, there is a carefully crafted array of induction experiences for new teachers, including:

- *Practice groups.* These are a form of structured, facilitated networking that supports beginning teachers from different schools as they learn to be effective solvers of practical problems.

- *Standortbestimmung.* Practice groups generally conclude with a group *Standortbestimmung* — a form of self-evaluation of the first year of teaching that reflects the Swiss concern with developing the whole person as well as the teacher.

- *Counseling.* Counseling is generally available for all teachers, but a greater number of beginning teachers take part. It can grow out of the practice groups and can involve one-on-one mentoring of classroom practice. In some cantons, counseling is mandatory for beginning teachers.

- *Courses.* Course offerings range from obligatory courses to voluntary courses available on a regular basis to "impulse courses," put together on short notice to meet a short-term need.

These practices are supported with training for practice-group leaders, counselors, and mentors.

A professional team heads the whole set of induction activities and is in

charge of the practice-group leaders. The group leaders, all active teachers themselves, are the key to the quality of the practice groups and other components of induction, such as classroom visits and individual counseling. These individuals are relieved of some of their teaching duties to make time for their responsibilities as practice-group leaders. They also receive additional pay and are themselves supported by the central team. The group leaders are trained for their responsibilities and take part in a wide range of professional development offerings to increase their competence as leaders.

CHINA (SHANGHAI)

The teaching culture in Shanghai features research groups and collective lesson planning. It is a culture in which all teachers learn to engage in joint work to support their teaching and their personal learning, as well as the learning of their pupils. The induction process is designed to help bring new teachers into this culture.

There is an impressive array of learning opportunities at both the school and the district level, among them:

- welcoming ceremonies at the school;
- district-level workshops and courses;
- district-organized teaching competitions;
- district-provided mentoring;
- a district hot line for new teachers that connects them with subject specialists;
- district awards for outstanding novice/mentor work;
- half-day training sessions at colleges of education and in schools for most weeks for the year;
- peer observation, both in and outside of school;

- public or “open” lessons, with debriefing and discussion of the lesson afterwards;

- report lessons, in which a new teacher is observed and given comments, criticisms, and suggestions;

- talk lessons, in which a teacher (new or experienced) talks through a lesson and provides justification for its design, but does not actually teach it;

- inquiry projects and action research carried out by new teachers, with support from those on the school or district teaching research section or induction staff;

- district- or school-developed handbooks for new teachers and mentors; and

- end-of-year celebrations of teachers’ work and collaboration.

In keeping with the collective and collaborative focus of the teaching culture in Shanghai, a number of other critical components play a role in the induction process for new teachers.

Lesson-preparation groups. The heart of the professional learning culture is the lesson-preparation group. These groups engage new and veteran teachers in discussing and analyzing the lessons they are teaching.

Teaching-research groups. A beginning teacher is also a member of a teaching-research group, which provides a forum for the discussion of teaching techniques. Each teacher, new or experienced, must observe at least eight lessons a semester, and most teachers observe more. It is very common for teachers to enter others’ classrooms and to engage in discussion about mutually observed teaching. These conversations help new teachers acquire the language and adopt the norms of public conversation about teaching, and that conversation becomes a natural part of the fabric of any teacher’s professional life.

Teaching competitions. Districts organize teaching competitions with the goal of motivating new teachers and encouraging the serious study of and preparation for teaching. The competitions also identify and honor outstanding accomplishment. Lessons are videotaped so that the district can compile an archive for future use. Teaching thus becomes community property, not owned privately by one teacher, but shared by all.

NEW ZEALAND

In New Zealand, the induction phase is called the Advice and Guidance (AG) program. The AG program is seen as the initial phase of the lifelong professional development of teachers. Every beginning teacher receives 20% released time to participate in the program.

Teachers and school-level administrators are willing to invest in the effort to support beginning teachers partly because schools are required to provide an AG program. Provisionally registered teachers must document the AG support they received during their first two years when they apply for a permanent certificate. But many of those who provide support for new teachers view their assistance as a commitment to the teaching profession.

The National Ministry of Education also provides limited regional resources for professional development services to beginning teachers. Regional meetings, which attract teachers from different schools, provide for the free exchange of induction experiences among a wide variety of participants. Although there is a national handbook outlining the goals of the AG program, the extent, nature, and quality of the local programs vary widely.

At the local school, an administrator or a staff member is typically the coordinator of the AG program.

The people involved most directly in supporting beginning teachers are typically the AG coordinator, department heads, “buddy teachers,” and, to a lesser extent, all other school staff members. In those schools that have more than one beginning teacher, the AG coordinator will convene all the beginning teachers every two weeks throughout most of the year. Observation of teaching is a key activity in school-level induction programs and comes in several varieties. As in Switzerland, facilitated peer support is an important induction strategy.

Ted Britton explains that one reason New Zealand was chosen as a subject for study was the contrast it offered with countries that place a great deal of the responsibility for assisting beginning teachers on a single mentor or on just a couple of people. (He was alluding to the United States.) Indeed, we were struck by the variety of the sources of support in New Zealand and by how the schools make use of a range of induction activities. Throughout the education system in New Zealand, there is a universal commitment to support beginning teachers.

JAPAN

Teaching in Japan is regarded as a high-status occupation, a dignified profession. New teachers receive a reduced teaching load and are assigned guiding teachers. The guiding teacher is the key to success in the Japanese system.

In school. All new teachers typically teach two or more demonstration lessons in their first year, with the lessons viewed by prefectural administrators, the guiding teacher, the school principal or assistant principal, and other teachers in the school. The demonstration or “study teaching” lesson, a traditional Japanese

method for improving teaching, is a formal public lesson, which is observed and then subjected to critique by colleagues.

James Stigler and James Hiebert view these lessons and their subsequent public analysis as the core activity of in-school teacher education.⁴ To prepare for their public lessons, the new teachers will have written and rewritten their lesson plans, practiced teaching the lesson with one of their classes, and modified the lesson with the help of a guiding teacher. They might even call teachers from neighboring schools, whom they know from their university or prefectural classes, and seek their help and advice.

In Japan, as in Shanghai, teaching is viewed as a public activity, open to scrutiny by many. The induction process welcomes beginners into that open practice and provides beginning teachers with many regular opportunities to observe their peers, their guiding teachers, and other teachers in their school, as well as those in other schools. No special arrangements need to be made, for schools and teaching are organized to allow for such open observations. Indeed, the method is so universal that all teachers have experienced it, and all seem to see its wisdom and believe in its efficacy. The most critical factor is that it is the *lesson* that is criticized, not the *teacher*.

New teachers are also required to submit a culminating “action research” project, based on a classroom lesson they would like to investigate. This project is usually about 30 to 40 pages in length and is to be handed in to the prefectural education office (though no formal feedback on it is provided). These projects are accumulated in the prefectural inservice offices and are available for other teachers to use.

Japanese teachers do not have their own, isolated offices. Rather, teams or

even an entire staff will occupy one large room with individual desks and the accompanying equipment and supplies. Thus a new teacher receives help from many teachers, since most veteran teachers believe it is their responsibility to help new teachers to become successful.

Out of school. Most out-of-school activity occurs under the guidance of a city or prefectural inservice center. Such a center is usually housed in a rather large building, is well staffed with specialists in most disciplines, and is dedicated to the inservice development of local teachers.

Induction is only the first phase of a teacher’s professional learning. All Japanese teachers must participate in sponsored inservice programs five, 10, and 20 years after their induction program has been completed.

FRANCE

To become a certified secondary teacher in France, one must successfully pass a highly competitive national secondary recruitment examination, both oral and written. A new teacher is referred to as a *stagiaire*, which translates roughly as someone who is undertaking a stage of development or formation.

A pedagogical advisor, appointed by a regional pedagogical inspector, is provided for all new secondary school *stagiaires*. When new teachers need advice, the advisors give it, but the teachers are encouraged to proceed on their own. *Stagiaires* observe one another’s classes on numerous occasions.

Off campus, all new teachers are required to attend sessions several days per week at the nearest IUFM (*Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres*), an institution created in 1991 specifically to handle teacher education and development. The main goal

of the IUFMs is to increase both the intellectual status of teacher education and the professionalism of teachers.

At the IUFM, groups of *stagiaires* meet, and their work is directed by their *formateur*, an experienced teacher educator who teaches in the classroom part time and is employed part time by the IUFM. *Formation* is the name given to the process a new teacher undergoes to become a member of the teaching profession, and the *formateur* is the person who provides formative experiences. *Formation* translates roughly as development or shaping. A typical day for a new teacher might include:

- preparing several lessons, teaching the lessons, and marking the pupils’ homework;
- tutoring a smaller group of pupils;
- observing the pedagogical advisor teach and discussing features of the lesson;
- observing, participating in, and discussing lessons taught by a teacher in a different school in the same town; and
- working on aspects of teaching for a day and a half at the IUFM.

A professional memoir, written under the guidance of a memoir tutor, is required of every new teacher. The memoir is a report on some detailed exploratory work relating to some aspect of teaching practice or to an academic issue. It can be done either individually or by a pair of *stagiaires*.

The compulsory learning opportunities for *stagiaires* are varied. In France, first-year teaching and learning about teaching take place in a number of settings, and a certain amount of flexibility is required, as *stagiaires* move between institutional settings. The French view working with different teachers as ideal for *formation*,

because these experiences bring the *stagiaires* into contact with a considerable number of different people in varied roles: the *formateurs*; the pedagogical advisors; the school staff in

prehensive, rigorous, and seriously monitored. There are well-defined roles for staff developers, administrators, instructors, mentors, or *formateurs*. In contrast, the professional de-

of the five countries focus on professional learning and on delivering growth and professionalism to their teachers. They achieve these ends with an organized, sustained professional development system that employs a variety of methods. These countries all consider their induction programs to be one phase or a single part of a total lifelong professional learning process.

In contrast, in more than 30 states, the nearly universal U.S. practice seems remarkably narrow: mentoring predominates, and often there is little more.⁷ In many schools, one-on-one mentoring is the dominant or even the sole strategy for supporting new teachers, and it often lacks real structure and relies on the willingness of the veteran teacher and the new teacher to seek each other out. Many mentors are assigned to respond to a new teacher's need for day-to-day survival

Although the induction approaches in the five countries differ from one another, they have three major similarities — they are highly structured, they focus on professional learning, and they emphasize collaboration.

different schools, including administrators and teachers of various subjects; the memoir tutor; different groups of pupils; parents; and possibly the regional pedagogical inspectors. The list is very long.

Stagiaires can come to think of the group with whom they work at the IUFM as a “tribe,” a group of same-subject teachers working together in their joint area of specialization. And the notion of “tribe” is an important one. Various things support the integrity of a tribe: shared experience, shared practices, shared tools, and shared language.

To an outsider, this process might look like induction that ends after the first year of teaching. But the French view it as simply part of teacher *formation*; it is the method by which the system takes in new members.

velopment programs in the United States are often sporadic, incoherent, and poorly aligned, and they lack adequate follow-up.⁵ The amount of time devoted to professional development on a given topic is most commonly about one day during the year for any given teacher.⁶

Second, the induction programs

APPLICATION TO NORTH AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Although the approaches to the induction of new teachers in the five countries discussed above differ from one another, they do have three major similarities that can provide useful ideas for staff developers responsible for induction programs in the U.S. First, the respective induction approaches are highly structured, com-

tips, and so they function primarily as a safety net for the new teachers.

Third, collaboration is the strength of each of these five induction programs. Collaborative group work is

interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers.⁸

Indeed, the most successful U.S. induction programs go beyond mentoring.⁹ They are structured, sustained,

achievement. But the bottom line remains: good teachers make the difference. Districts that provide structured, sustained induction, training, and support for their teachers achieve what every school district seeks to achieve — improved student learning through improved professional learning.

Isolation is the common thread and complaint among new teachers in U.S. schools. New teachers want more than a job. They want to contribute to a group.

understood, fostered, and accepted as a part of the teaching culture in all five countries surveyed. Experiences, practices, tools, and language are shared among teachers. And it is the function of the induction phase to engender this sense of group identity in new teachers and to begin treating them as colleagues.

In contrast, isolation is the common thread and complaint among new teachers in U.S. schools. New teachers want more than a job. They want to experience success. They want to contribute to a group. They want to make a difference. Thus collegial

intensive professional development programs that allow new teachers to observe others, to be observed by others, and to be part of networks or study groups in which all teachers share with one another and learn to respect one another's work. Michael Garet and his colleagues confirmed this finding when they showed that teachers learn more in teacher networks and study groups than with mentoring.¹⁰

In their examination of over 30 new teacher induction programs in the U.S., Annette Breaux and Harry Wong also found the inevitable presence of a leader.¹¹ These leaders have created organized and comprehensive induction programs that stress collaboration and professional growth. Teacher induction programs that rely on networking and collaboration can be found in such places as the Flowing Wells Schools in Tucson, Arizona (the Institute for Teacher Renewal and Growth); the Lafourche Parish Schools in Lafourche, Louisiana (the Framework for Inducting, Retaining, and Supporting Teachers program); and the Dallas Public Schools in Dallas, Texas (New Teacher Initiatives: New Teacher Support and Development Programs and Services).

The district staff developer and the building principal are the keys to establishing the commitment to teacher improvement and student

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