



# Producing Educational Leaders through Induction Programs

by Harry K. Wong

*In districts with programs for new-teacher induction and sustained professional development, teachers are more likely to grow into educational leaders.*

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**A**fter four years, Melissa Pantoja, an art teacher in the Rockwall Independent School District in Texas, has become an educational leader. Her effectiveness and leadership are well recognized as she serves on the school's improvement committee, chairs the fine arts festival, is the campus' mentor trainer, and—at the urging of an administrator who saw her leadership potential—is working on her master's degree in mid-management and principalship.

Her professional career as a teacher began successfully on her very first day in the El Reno School District of Oklahoma, with the help of a script that organized her classroom (Wong and Wong 2000). She had a plan for greeting her students, what to wear, what to say,

what to duplicate as handouts, and what procedures to teach immediately to create a sense of consistency and organization in her classroom. Melissa's classroom management readiness, which helped make her first year of teaching a success, was largely the result of the district's two-year new-teacher induction program. Further, that induction program positioned her not only to be a successful and effective teacher, but also to grow into an educational leader.

## Induction Is Just the Beginning

The Flowing Wells Schools of Tucson, Arizona have produced 12 finalists for Teacher of the Year—more than any other school district—for the State of Arizona.

These leaders are arguably the result of a process that begins with new-teacher induction and eight years later produces teacher leaders. This process operates under the banner of the Institute for Teacher Renewal and Growth, the district's organized, sustained professional development program, easily understood as a one-page rubric (Breux and Wong 2003). The new teachers are called *novices* in their first year. With regular workshops, instruction, and support during the school year, the novices become *advanced beginners* in their second year. Continuing the induction process, they are considered *competent* teachers in their third year; and in their fourth year, they are deemed *proficient*. In their eighth year, they are considered *expert* teachers, with the leadership skills to take active roles in the school and community. The induction program flows seamlessly into an organized, lifelong, professional development program where veteran teachers can grow and renew themselves.

The comprehensive, sustained induction process at the Flowing Wells Schools, in operation for 18 years, is so successful and replicated that the district holds an annual workshop to explain the structure to interested parties (Breux and Wong 2003). After attending a workshop, a staff developer shared:

*The induction program is an incredibly designed, implemented, and focused plan of professional development. The support for new teachers (and all teachers) is so evident and powerful that Flowing Wells truly exemplifies the notion of a school district as a family.*

In the Flowing Wells School

District, everyone is a leader—from the superintendent to the principals, teachers, students, and even the food service workers. Yet, this is possible only because all share a mission and a vision that are acculturated through the induction process.

As Joan Hearne, administrator in the Wichita, Kansas Schools said, "As a central office staff developer, I truly believe in the induction process. If you do not transmit a district's culture, mission, and beliefs as employees join the family, then when do you?"

The success and leadership potential of a comprehensive, sustained induction program is also evident at the Lafourche Parish Public Schools of Louisiana. That district replicated an induction program within a few months after returning from a Flowing Wells workshop. After the first year of the induction program, the new-teacher attrition rate at Lafourche Parish Schools dropped from 51 percent to 15 percent; and today it hovers around seven percent.

In the Lafourche Parish Schools, new teachers are trained to meet the challenges of the classroom and to comply with state standards. The district's newly structured curriculum is solid, detailed, and well organized; new teachers receive specific training in what and how to teach. The benefits are obvious: Of the new teachers who participated in the district's induction program, more than 99 percent successfully completed the performance-based Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program, required for teacher certification in the state. The Lafourche induction program is so successful, in fact, that the Louisiana Department of Educa-

tion (2001) adopted it as the model for the entire state.

## Mentoring vs. Induction

The words *mentoring* and *induction* are often confused and misused (Wong 2002). These two terms are not synonymous. Induction is a process used by districts to train, support, and retain new teachers. It is a highly organized and comprehensive staff development process, involving many people and components, which typically continues as a sustained process for two to five years. Albeit important, mentoring is but one component of the induction process (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Some Components of Induction Programs**

- Pre-school year workshop
- Welcome center
- Bus tour
- Networks, study groups
- Mentors, facilitators, coaches
- Portfolio, video
- Demonstration classrooms
- Administrative support
- Learning circles

Mentoring alone will do little to aid in the retention of highly qualified new teachers. However, as an integral component of a structured induction program, it can be valuable. Understand that induction is ongoing and systematic, whereas a mentor may be someone who is assigned two weeks after the school year begins and may not be trained, compensated, or provided release time to help, much less be in the same building and teach at the same grade level or subject area.

Regretfully, many educators believe that all a new teacher needs is a mentor. They try to portray

mentoring as an effective stand-alone method for supporting and retaining teachers. In far too many instances, a mentor is simply a veteran teacher who has been haphazardly selected by the principal and assigned to a new teacher. Sharon Feiman-Nemser (1996) wrote that after 20 years of experimenting with mentoring as a process for helping new teachers, few comprehensive studies validate its effectiveness.

Mentors cannot replace or be the only form of formal or informal induction assistance. Britton, Paine, Raizen, and Pimm (2003) reported that, in more than 30 states, mentoring predominates as an induction method, often with little more. This universal practice seems remarkably narrow. Yet, in many schools, one-on-one mentoring is the dominant or sole strategy for supporting new teachers. Moreover, these mentoring programs often lack structure and rely greatly on the willingness of the veteran and new teacher to seek out one another.

Britton et al. (2003) further reported that many mentors are assigned to respond to a new teacher's day-to-day crises and provide teaching tips for survival. Mentors in this role serve simply as a safety net for new teachers. Clearly, leadership does not develop from teachers who are in a survival mode. Thus, mentoring alone does not produce leaders.

According to the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Commission (1995, 11), "Giving a teacher a mentor 'only' is a convenient and unconsciously foolish way for an administrator to divorce himself or herself from the leadership required to bring a beginning teacher up to professional maturity level."

The Commission found that principals and new teachers rated mentoring the least-effective way to help new teachers. One out of four new teachers claimed that they received either "poor support" or "no support" from their mentors. Simply assigning a mentor does little to remedy the situation of new teachers becoming discouraged and leaving the profession.

Schmoker (2001) observed, "So-called 'mentors' are everywhere these days, but they aren't

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often given release time or a clear, compelling charge." Saphier (in Saphier, Freedman, and Aschheim 2001, 36) related, "For too many teachers, the mentoring pairing process results in a 'blind date.' The teachers do not know each other and neither partner has input into the pairing."

What's really scary about all this talk about "mentoring only" is that it has become institutionalized. The press and some professional journals are prescribing it as the standard cure-all for the diffi-

culties faced by new teachers. This cure-all, however, is a myth. The reality is that after more than 20 years of trying mentoring as a means of helping new teachers, there is no substantive research supporting its efficacy. Inherent in the title of their book, Saphier, Freedman, and Aschheim (2001) suggested that it is time to move "beyond mentoring."

### Leadership Evolves from Induction

What motivates and creates leadership is a structured, sustained, intensive professional development program that allows new teachers to observe others, to be observed by others, and to be part of networks or study groups where all teachers share together, grow together, learn to respect one another's work, and collaboratively become leaders together. Leadership evolves from an induction process, because that process is collaborative and organizes the expertise of educators within the shared values of a culture (Wong 2003a).

How does the induction process promote leadership? These are some of the strategies that successful induction programs use:

- Support networks that create learning communities.
- Treat every colleague as a potential valuable contributor.
- Produce leaders by turning ownership of learning over to the learners in study groups.
- Create learning communities where everyone, new teachers as well as veteran teachers, gains knowledge.
- Demonstrate that quality teaching becomes not just an individual, but also a group responsibility.

When you have a school culture that exemplifies these goals, you have a family of teacher leaders.

### The New Teacher's Perspective

If you are a potential new teacher, the most important question you need to ask during the interview is "Does the district have an induction program?" Why? Your success as a teacher may depend on it. An induction program may be the key factor in determining whether you succeed as a teacher, or you leave disillusioned after you have invested four years of your life and thousands of dollars only to see your dream evaporate.

Can an induction program really make a difference? You bet! Compare the attrition rates of teachers who have participated in induction programs to those of new teachers in general. More than 50 percent of teachers in an urban setting leave their jobs after the first two years, and more than 50 percent of all new public school teachers leave after five years (Wong 2003b, 19–20). Now compare those statistics to attrition rates from some districts that had induction programs in the 2001–02 school year (Wong 2003b, 19–20):

- The Lafourche Parish Schools in Louisiana lost one teacher out of 46 hired.

- The Islip Public Schools in New York lost three teachers out of 68 hired.

- The Leyden High School District in Illinois lost four teachers out of 90 hired.

- The Geneva Community Schools in New York lost five teachers out of 67 hired.

- The Newport-Mesa School

District in California lost five teachers out of 148 hired.

What these districts, and many more, have in common is a new-teacher induction program—a formal, comprehensive, structured program designed to train, support, and retain new teachers. Where a successful induction program is in place, you can measure the results in the district's retention rate. Moreover, there you will find teachers who are effective and successful, who stay, and who con-

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comitantly produce student achievement.

So, if you are a potential new teacher, how do you identify a district with an induction program? Ask! And make sure it is a structured, organized induction program and not just a day of orientation or pairing up with a mentor or buddy. This support is critical to your teaching success. An induction program is a message to you that a district cares about you, values you, and wants you to succeed and stay—and like Melissa Pantoja, become a leader.

### A True Induction Program

You can recognize a true induction program by its purpose, components, and structure. Its purpose is to provide instruction in classroom and teacher effectiveness; reduce the intensity of transition into teaching; and increase the retention of greater numbers of highly qualified teachers.

An induction process must have three components:

- **Training.** Through a series of networks, workshops, demonstration classrooms, visitations, and debriefing sessions, new teachers are taught and shown effective classroom strategies.

- **Support.** A cadre of mentors, administrators, and staff developers work personally and in regularly scheduled sessions to support and assist the new teacher.

- **Retention.** When administered effectively, new teachers are trained, supported, and retained.

An effective induction program, which clearly has administrative support, is structured to begin with four or five days of workshops and classes before school starts. Over a subsequent period of two to three years, the program should include a continuum of systematic training for professional development. The structure also should allow for modeling effective teaching during in-services and mentoring, as well as opportunities for inductees to visit demonstration classrooms.

During an interview, ask the following questions to help you identify a school or district that is interested in training, supporting, and retaining new teachers.

- Is there an induction program for newly hired teachers?

- How long is the program?

## Strategies Used by Exemplary Induction Programs

Effective induction programs (Wong 2002) incorporate all or many of the following strategies into a comprehensive, formalized process to train, support, and retain new teachers.

**Welcome Center.** The Clark County Schools in Nevada have a welcome center where new teachers can get help finding housing and setting up utilities, pick up maps, and get bank recommendations and assistance with their other needs. The schools also host a community day, where local merchants share their services and products, and provide breakfast and lunch.

**Script.** The El Reno School District in Oklahoma has a two-year induction program in which new teachers learn how to script their first day of school so that they can begin with a plan of action.

**Pre-School Workshops.** Four staff developers in the Lafourche Parish Schools of Thibodaux, Louisiana, conduct five days of instruction, immersing new teachers in the district's culture and uniting them with members of the district to form a cohesive, supportive instructional team.

**Bus Tour.** The superintendent acts as a tour guide on a chartered bus trip throughout the Flowing Wells school district of Tucson, Arizona, providing a rite of passage into the culture of the community.

**Demonstration Classrooms.** In the Mesa, Arizona schools, master teachers set up model classrooms, where new teachers can observe how effective class-

rooms are managed, especially for the first day of school.

**Networking.** The induction program of the Islip Public Schools of New York features collaborative study group activities led by veteran teachers and district curriculum leaders. Study groups focus on skill-building strategies, such as conducting parent conferences, managing the classroom, crafting lesson plans, and implementing cooperative discipline. The groups constantly work on team-building and problem-solving techniques. They use model lessons and hold sharing sessions in which teachers learn from and build respect for one another.

**Continuous Education.** Workshops and college classes are held in the Blue Valley School District 229 of Overland Park, Kansas. That district's induction model won the NEA-AFT Saturn/UAW Partnership Award, which is a cooperative effort between the school district, the teacher's organization, and the University of Kansas.

**Long-Term Learning.** In Community Consolidated School District 15 of Palatine, Illinois, the new-teacher induction program is a mandatory four-year professional development program that helps prepare new-teachers for national board certification.

**Support Providers.** Each new teacher in the Hopewell, Virginia school district has three support providers: a mentor, a coach, and a lead teacher. In 1998-99, the district hired 47 new teachers and

retained all but one.

**Formative Assessment.** In the two-year induction process of the California Beginning Teachers Support and Assessment program, new teachers are provided more than 10 hours of orientation and classroom management training before the school year, followed by workshops throughout the first two years. Other forms of assistance include one-on-one support provided by a qualified and trained veteran teacher; four release days to observe other teachers, attend conferences, or plan and communicate with colleagues; \$150 for the purchase of classroom materials; and up to \$1,050 for district- and site-specific professional development. Beginning teachers are guided by an ongoing formative assessment process, which includes developing an Individual Learning Plan, being assessed according to a Developmental Continuum of Teacher Ability rubrics, keeping a collaborative assessment log, participating in formal and informal observations, analyzing student work according to content standards, and presenting their portfolios to colleagues at a colloquium.

**Graduation.** Many districts, such as the Lafourche Parish Schools of Louisiana, have formal graduation ceremonies to signify entry into a family of collaborative learners. There is always food and the awarding of diplomas, and sometimes candlelight, poetry, multimedia presentations, and stirring speeches.



- Who coordinates and teaches the program?
- What is the course outline?
- Has the school principal been through the induction program?
- Will I be evaluated by any of the people running the induction program?
- Will my colleagues nurture me to become a more effective teacher?
- What is the attrition rate of new teachers over the past two years?
- What will the school district do to help if I am not being successful in the classroom?
- Will leadership roles be available to me in the future?

The message to all new teachers is pointedly very simple. Find a school that needs you, values you, and wants to support you in your mission of enhancing young people's lives. If this is not happening, move on to a supportive environment. Many school dis-

tricts have formal induction programs that will train and support you with the vision of keeping and nourishing you to become a teacher leader. The children of the world need you, and the educational community needs leaders.

### Induction Produces Leaders

An organized induction program will produce leaders. Teachers and principals often feel isolated in their jobs and thirst for more opportunities to network, share, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their craft. They want a culture that acknowledges, respects, and nurtures them as professionals. They want to be involved in decision-making and leadership in their schools. They want increased opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills and to advance in their careers; and they want these opportunities available throughout their teaching careers. Given these opportunities, which an or-

ganized, new-teacher induction and sustained professional development program can provide, new and veteran teachers are more likely to stay with a district and develop into leaders.

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