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Understanding the need for Induction Programmes for Beginning Teachers in Independent Catholic Secondary Schools in New South Wales

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Abstract

This article reports on the initial findings and justification for research undertaken in a Doctor of Education course at the University of Wollongong regarding induction programmes for beginning teachers in New South Wales independent Catholic high schools in the Sydney region. A review of relevant literature has identified seven elements of effective induction that have been utilised to select six Catholic independent high schools in Sydney to participate in a collective case study, which seeks to ascertain the nature of effective induction in these schools. The purpose of the case studies is to better understand the successes and limitations of these programmes and prepare policy recommendations for relevant bodies, such as the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) and the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA), to inform the development of training programmes for school leaders to implement effective beginning teacher induction in their schools. The research will involve purposive sampling of schools that meet the criteria specified for effective induction; interviews of administrators and beginning teachers in the selected schools to better understand their perceptions and expectations of the programme; and, a document review of relevant policies, both from the schools and pertinent agencies, both government and private, that are related to the independent education sector. This paper will present the initial findings from the literature review that has culminated in the seven elements of 'best practice' in beginning teacher induction and the justification and the necessity of this research to enhance student learning and improve teacher retention.

Introduction

The importance of induction programmes for beginning teachers for the purposes of retaining teachers, arresting teacher attrition rates, enhancing teaching and learning, and improving teacher efficacy is well addressed in the literature (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Howe, 2006;) and has far reaching implications for the support and development of such programmes at the school level. This paper seeks to justify a research project to ascertain the nature of successful induction in NSW independent Catholic high schools, with the aim of informing policy that could be used to promote successful, effective induction to a broader range of Catholic independent schools throughout NSW.

While the literature asserts the necessity for effective induction to support early career teachers in Australia (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2002), studies surveying teachers across the country found that there were discrepancies between what school administrators reported about beginning teachers receiving induction and the responses of teachers (DEST 2002; Australian Education Union (AEU), 2007; AEU, 2008). In these reports the AEU (2007) found that more than half of beginning teachers had not participated in formal mentoring in 2006. In 2008, the results from the 2007 survey were no more optimistic. The report found that in 2007, 55.3% of beginning teachers had not been involved in an ongoing induction process (AEU 2008). While there is definitely a discrepancy between Commonwealth recommendations (DEST, 2002) and teachers' experiences throughout the country in the years that followed the publication of those recommendations, historically, this is not uncommon according to the Ramsey Report:

Teaching is the most reviewed profession in Australia ... since 1980 there have been 20 significant national and state reviews of teacher education. The most common characteristic of these reviews has been the lack of action on their recommendations. This situation contrasts markedly with other professions (2000 par. 35).

There are far-reaching implications for the failure to heed the recommendations of the Commonwealth in this situation. New teachers often cite failure to receive adequate mentoring and supervision, support in behavior management, excessive responsibilities and failure to recognize and reward professional growth in their early years as common concerns (McCormack, 2005; Ramsey, 2000). These issues amongst others if not taken seriously and ameliorated by the school will affect the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom

(King & Newman, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers have indicated the necessity of professional development, specifically in the early years of teaching to help alleviate the problems they face, such as those mentioned above (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon & Birman, 2001). The literature has been advocating induction programmes as an essential step to help early career teachers cope with the difficulties often faced in the early years of teaching since the 1970s in the United States (Wood & Stanulis, 2009) and for at least the past decade in Australia (Ramsey, 2000). However, despite the research and subsequent approaches to deal with these problems, beginning teachers are still abandoning the profession at alarming rates. The DEST (2003) found that 25% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years. Additionally in NSW, which has an ageing teacher population, over 40% of the teaching community will be retiring in the next 5 years (Gavrielatos, 2008; Australian Associated Press [AAP], 2008). What this means is there is an inevitable crisis looming in NSW schools (AAP, 2008; Currie, 2000). The numbers reveal a serious problem in teacher attrition rates; however, they also reveal the necessity of educational leaders to focus on teacher retention (Smethem, 2007; Williby, 2004) through effective induction (Carr & Evans, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004)

Defining Induction

The definition of what constitutes induction is an important consideration before defining what constitutes effective induction. The literature portrays varying descriptions of induction and fluctuating degrees of induction. Martinez (1994) indicates that the term induction needs careful definition to avoid an interpretation that simply ends up being orientation to the work place rather than being a full support programme to meet the needs of the beginning teacher. Wong (2004) says that the terms mentoring and induction are often, albeit wrongly, used interchangeably, which takes away from the value of induction as a process, rather than simply an action.

It is essential that schools that are implementing induction programmes for beginning teachers have a conceptualisation of induction that is congruent with the recommendations made by the DEST, if those recommendations are the basis for the instigation of the programme. The DEST (2002) states that induction denotes support programmes for beginning teachers and that it is a “critical phase” in a “continuum of professional development” (p.11). The study goes on to conclude that an on-going induction programme that includes, “orientation to the profession and/or the organisation, personal and professional support, and opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes essential for effective

teaching,” (DEST 2002, p.11) are imperative in helping to produce teachers that remain in the profession.

While this study is primarily concerned with teachers in NSW independent Catholic high schools, it also draws on research from the United States, where comprehensive induction for beginning teachers has been researched and reported on for the past three decades (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). In the U.S. Smith and Ingersoll have been leading contributors to the research regarding the effects of comprehensive induction programmes, including mentoring, on beginning teachers specifically with regards to retention. They define induction as a collective of programmes involving orientation, support, and guidance for beginning teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

For the purpose of this study and for the determination of the elements of ‘best practice’ induction that ultimately decided the schools that would be chosen, an operational definition of induction needed to be established. The operational definition is based on the research from the U.S., including but not limited to, Smith & Ingersoll (2004), the work of Alliance for Excellent Education (AAE, 2004) and Wood & Stanulis (2009); and in Australia, the DEST (2002) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)(2006) in Victoria. Beginning teacher induction can therefore be defined as the primary phase in a multi-faceted continuum of structured beginning teacher professional development towards their progression into the learning community and continuing professional development throughout their career (Kearney, 2010).

Justification

The justification provided for this research project is two-fold: On the one hand, research concerning independent schools and their unique characteristics with regards to student achievement (Evans, 2004) and school governance (McCormick, Barnett, Alavi & Newcombe 2006), has led the literature; however, with specific reference to teacher professional development, mentoring and induction I have found the research to be extremely limited. On the other hand, the research concerning induction and the imperative to secure the future of effective teachers in both the U.S. and Australia is astounding. While it is easy to exploit the large number of teachers reaching retirement age in coming years (Mackey, 2004; AAP, 2008) and the high teacher attrition rates we are facing in Australia (Gavrielatos, 2008; DEST, 2002) as justification for this study, there needs to be something more

sustainable and pragmatic about research into induction practices to achieve the necessary impact to encourage change in the independent sector of education in Australia.

We already know that students in Australian independent schools and Catholic systemic schools¹, which educate approximately 34% of Australian students (Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA), 2010), achieve at a higher rate on almost every measurable educational outcome, despite virtually no difference in ability distributions in the three sectors of education, i.e. Independent, Catholic systemic and Government/Public (Williams & Carpenter, 1991); however, the reasons for achievement variance in any educational sector is heavily reliant, 30% according to Hattie, on the teacher's impact (Hattie, 2003). Williams and Carpenter (1991) conclude that there are a range of factors that cause the discrepancy between students' achievements in independent and government schools including length of schooling career (0.5-0.7 years longer in independent schools) and the educative postural stance of parents; however, the social factors of education, including: social class, socio-economic status and educational attainment of parents, was found to have minimal impact in their study of student success in the different sectors of education. This is supported up by Hattie (2003) who found that the school students attended, their home life, their peer influences and the principal of the school combined, has less affect on achievement than the impact of the teacher. The only factor affecting achievement more than the quality of the teacher is the student's own educative disposition i.e. cognitive ability, disposition to learn and the affective and physical attributes of the student (Hattie, 2003).

What this means, and this assertion is upheld by Hattie's research, is that in order to affect a positive influence on student achievement, which should be a primary focus of schools, more energy needs to be concentrated on developing successful effective educators, as this is, "the single most powerful influence on achievement" (Hattie, 2003 p.4). There is an important inference that can be made from Hattie's findings about the impact a teacher has on student achievement. The correlation between induction and enhanced student achievement has been made by Bartlett and Johnson (2010) who say that:

Following the logic of induction, participation in a comprehensive program leads to increased teacher learning resulting in higher quality teachers and better retention and, by extension, to increased student learning (p.868).

¹ These statistics must be shown together as the Australian Bureau of Statistics data does not categorise independent Catholic schools as independent.

Although there have not been any empirical studies that specifically address the effects of induction programmes on students' performance (Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008), the suggestion that induction contributes to factors such as beginning teacher efficacy and pedagogical practice (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003), which in turn have been shown to have a strong relationship with student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986) demonstrates that it is more than just conjecture to suggest that beginning teacher induction may have a positive effect on students' achievement; however, more research directly related to this relationship is required to draw this conclusion.

Characteristics of Effective Induction

The acknowledgement of the necessity of a quality induction programme for beginning teachers is only the first stage in the development of an effective programme. The varying perceptions of induction make the design of universal programs difficult. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) indicate that the different purposes of induction have a lot to do with the type of programs being offered. It is also clear that the contextual needs of individual teachers and schools influence the structure of teacher induction programs; therefore, the elements of induction that are deemed 'best practice' by the literature need to be dynamic and adaptive to cater to the differing needs of beginning teachers and their schools. What is needed is a conceptualisation of induction that is congruent with the literature and is successful at acculturating new teachers into their profession and easing their transition from pre-service teachers into successful and effective practitioners in a continuum of professional development.

Five key studies were examined to develop the selection criteria for effective induction into learning communities: NCTAF 2005, which examined induction into learning communities in schools across the U.S.; Smith and Ingersoll (2004), which investigated the effects of induction on beginning teacher attrition; Wong (2004), which considered the ways that induction programmes help improve beginning teacher practice; AEU (2006), which surveyed beginning teachers across Australia to determine their attitudes towards 'key issues' in education; and, DEST (2002), which aimed to improve the preparation and support of beginning teachers in their transition from initial training to teaching in schools.

A review of the aforementioned studies resulted in the following elements being identified as 'best practice' in effective beginning teacher induction programmes:

- Professional Support [from the school or the administrative hierarchy]
- Structured Time Release [from teaching and administrative duties]
- Collaboration with Staff [that is meaningful and purposeful with regards to teaching and learning]
- External Meetings or Seminars [the provision of time and allowance for attending]
- Beginning Teacher Conferences [the provision of time and allowance for attending]
- Provision of a Mentor [by the school or administrative hierarchy]
- The Induction programme is part of a larger school, district, or state based programme of professional learning

In total the five studies identified thirteen different elements of effective induction; these seven were identified in at least three of the five studies listed above. While each of the elements was selected because of their identification in the majority of the studies selected, they also needed to be dynamic and adaptive enough to suit the operational definition of induction mentioned earlier. In a recent article on beginning teacher induction policy, Bartlett and Johnson (2010) report that, “elements of effective induction are still being mapped by scholars” (p.848); therefore, it is not the intention of this study to conclude that the seven elements identified as ‘best practice’ above are beyond reproach. Instead what it offers is a basis on which to compare and contrast successful induction in the schools selected for the study.

The importance of induction for beginning teachers has already been identified in the literature as a way to improve teacher retention in the early years of a career (Smith & Ingersoll 2004) and suggests that induction improves teacher knowledge and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000); therefore, this study seeks to establish a foundational basis to propose policy that can aid in the development of effective teacher induction programmes across a specific educational sector that receives little oversight. Bartlett and Johnson (2010) identify a duality in the research literature in regard to induction and policy. They note that centralised information and resources and local adaptability are key features in the literature (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010); however, the achievement of both of these is extremely difficult. In Australia, the independent system offers no such programmes because it is, “in no way a system” (Holden 2000 in DEST 2002, chap. 2, p.1), instead each

school operates on its own with only loose connections to organisations such as the AIS and ISCA (DEST, 2002).

The importance of induction policy to ensure effective programmes has been found to be essential in garnering the benefits of induction (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010). Although independent schools in Australia do not work as a system, there is the potential to have organisations such as the AIS, ISCA and IEU (Independent Education Union) endorse a specific model of induction that has been shown to be effective in similar schools.

Organisations such as the NSWIT (New South Wales Institute of Teachers), who accredit all teachers in NSW, say that in order for teachers to attain professional competence, the minimum level required for ongoing employment, “they [must] have successfully undertaken an induction program and have met the standards for professional competence (NSWIT, 2004, professional teaching standards). The DEST (2002), states that induction is a “critical phase within a continuum of professional learning, which begins with pre-service education and extends throughout the teaching career” (p.113). The AEU, advocates, “improved induction program for new and beginning teachers and principals” (2010 p.5). And, the NSW DET (Department of Education and Training) report that induction is provided to all staff at the principal’s discretion, and includes:

Orientation to the NSW Department of Education and Training, orientation to the school as well as a school-based induction program involving: structured supervision, collegial support, mentoring and professional networking (accessed: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/areas/nt/ntinduction.htm>.)

It seems most, if not all, of the governing and administrating bodies of education are advocating induction programmes for beginning teachers; however, as has been shown previously, most teachers are not receiving it. While the research has had an effect on policy development, specifically within the government sector of schooling in NSW, the same cannot be said for independent schools. And despite the policy developments that have been made in the government sector, in 2007, “55.3% [of teachers] said they have never been involved with an ongoing induction process” (AEU, 2008 p.4). The need for comprehensive policy, not only advocating induction, but showcasing effective induction, is needed to affect change at the school level. It is my contention that a cultural and theoretical shift in our understanding and perception of induction needs to take place before effective induction can take hold in our schools. If we can acknowledge that: Quality teaching is one of the most, if not the most, significant factor in determining student achievement; that induction

programmes for beginning teachers are an initial, essential step in the continuum of professional development to help early career teachers overcome the obstacles and challenges of the early years of teaching, reduce the risk of attrition, and improve teaching and learning in the classroom; then, and only then, have we taken the first step towards induction programmes that can make a positive difference to student achievement.

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