An Analysis of Practices Used to Support New Teachers

By Katherine Perez, Carole Swain, & Carolyn S. Hartsough

Introduction

Assisting beginning teachers in their development toward becoming competent professionals is critically important in education today. Learning to teach is an evolving process, involving several stages of development and extending well into the first several years of teaching (Morey & Murphy, 1990). Effective new teacher support programs should provide an integrated, systematic approach in order to prepare confident teachers who will remain in the profession.

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Many beginning teachers leave the profession after only a short time in the classroom. Various estimates suggest that about 30 percent of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years and that almost 40 percent leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Heyns, 1988; Schlechty & Vance, 1981, 1983). Several factors contribute to this, including the isolation and lack of support often experienced by beginning teachers (Dworkin, 1987;

Fullan, 1993). Those who stay frequently must find their own means of support and assistance.

Major initiatives have emerged over the past decade with the goal of supporting new teachers. These initiatives include: providing beginning teachers with guidance and support from mentor teachers, promoting the professional development of beginning teachers, and retaining beginning teachers (Odell, 1990). Nationwide, beginning teacher induction programs, often including mentor teachers, have become one of the most popular reforms for improving the retention and quality of teachers (Little, 1990).

The successes of the California New Teacher Support Project (CNTP) have evolved into the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA). The BTSA Project in which St. Mary's College of California participates is a collaborative of 11 school districts, two county offices of education, and our college. We have invested our resources in district coaching and college supervisor support which includes classroom observation and conferencing. Additionally, monthly seminars, county and college workshops, and a newsletter are offered to new teachers and their coaches.

A Teacher Portfolio was selected over standardized measures and observation systems to provide the assessment component of the program. The Portfolio process is anchored to the Six Domains of the Draft Framework of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities for Beginning Teachers in California (Stansbury & Long, 1992). The Portfolio process provides new teachers and their coaches with an opportunity to construct a picture of the new teachers' strengths and areas of growth and provides both teachers and coaches with an action plan for their work together.

As a BTSA partner, our interest in conducting this study was to investigate what a cross-section of peers and like-role groups—new teachers and experienced educators—believed to be the most effective practices in supporting new teachers. Accordingly, this study reports the results of quantitative analysis of a survey to determine the most helpful practices used to support new teachers and to discuss implications for practice. After two years of implementation, the exploration of how strategies for new teacher support are perceived by BTSA participants and by other professionals interested in new teacher induction was relevant for informing our own practice as well as for understanding and designing future activities.

Questions to be answered by this study included:

1) What are perceived to be the most successful practices used to support new teachers?
2) What are perceived to be the least effective practices used to support new teachers?
3) How should resources for new teacher support be allocated?
4) What are the implications for offering various support practices for new teachers?

Method

Data were collected in two phases. At a symposium to which 214 BTSA participants were invited, 141 experienced educators (mean number of years in education = 20) responded to the survey. They rated 20 frequently used support strategies for their level of effectiveness in sustaining new teachers on a scale from 1 = "not at all important" to 6 = "extremely important." The survey contained 20 of 32 strategies used to support new teachers that were described by Diane S. Murphy, Katherine K. Merseth, and Ann I. Morey (1993) in "Content and Strategies for Assisting New Teachers."

Seeking an empirical justification for condensing the 20 activities into a smaller number of meaningful dimensions for statistical analysis, the results from this administration were subjected to a factor analysis using a principal axis solution followed by varimax rotation (Thorndike, 1978). This factoring yielded five dimensions incorporating all 20 activities. The five dimensions that emerged from the responses were labeled: Reflective, Non-Interactive, Interactive (Expert/Novice), Personal/ Professional, and Staff Development. These five constructs are not only empirically justifiable, but also conceptually congruent with new teacher support practices (Huling-Austin, 1990). The five dimensions and associated activities are displayed in Table 1, which shows the activities associated with each dimension as well as the mean scores for each activity by role group. For subsequent analyses, composite dimension scores were computed by averaging item scores for the activities associated with each dimension.

The second administration of the survey was given to 39 newly inducted teachers (all first or second year elementary teachers) from our BTSA project. Of major interest was a comparison of the newly recruited teachers' perceptions to those of the experienced educators regarding the usefulness of the support dimensions. In order to further clarify whether role differences among the experienced educators might influence their perceptions as compared to those of new teachers, the experienced educators were subdivided into those whose work was primarily classroom teaching (N = 77), college level training of teachers (N = 28), or school administration (N = 36).

A two-way analysis of variance with repeated measures was performed on the composite support dimension scores. The between-subjects factor in the design was role group (new teachers, experienced teachers, administrators, and college faculty) and the within-subjects factor consisted of the five domains of support activities. It should be noted that the extensive data analysis procedures would have been stronger with a larger sample size. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

Table I

New Teacher Support Survey Results

	NT	ET	FAC	ADM	Combined Mean
Dimension I. Reflective					
Mean Score	***3.7***	***4.0***	***4.4***	***4.2***	***4.1***
4. Cluster Groups	4.5	4.8	5.2	5.2	4.9
6. Curriculum Forums and Follow-up Meetings	4.3	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.5
5. Journals	3.1	4.0	4.4	4.1	3.9
20. Clinical Supervision	3.6	3.9	4.7	3.8	3.9
11. Critical Incident Summaries	3.4	3.8	4.1	4.1	3.8
17. Case Studies	3.2	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.6
13. Integration of Research Literature	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.9	3.7
Dimension II. Non-Interactive					
Mean Score	***3.6***	***3.9***	***3.8***	***4.0***	***3.8***
3. Help-Line	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.1
9. Assess to Assist	3.3	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.7
14. Videotapes	3.2	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.7
18. Newsletters	3.7	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.8
Dimension III. Interactive (Expert/Novice)					
Mean Score	***4.8***	***5.1***	***5.0***	***5.2***	***5.0***
2. Lesson Observations and Conferencing	5.1	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.4
16. Coaching	5.0	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.3
8. Team Teaching	4.8	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.1
12. Second-Year Teachers as Buddies	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.6
19. Teacher Portfolio	3.9	4.2	4.6	4.6	4.3
Dimension IV. Personal/Professional Growth					
Mean Score	***4.7***	***4.6***	***4.5***	***4.1***	***4.5***
15. Professional Growth Planning	4.6	4.8	4.7	4.4	4.7
10. University Courses for Beginning Teachers	4.8	4.4	4.3	3.9	4.3
Dimension V. Staff Development					
Mean Score	***4.7***	***4.7***	***4.7***	***4.7***	***4.7***
7. Team Approach to Assistance	4.6	4.5	4.9	4.7	4.6
1. Workshops, Conferences and Meetings	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7	4.7

Key: NT=New Teachers (1-2 years experience) **ET**=Experienced Teachers (over 5 years experience) **ADM**=School District Administrator **FAC**=College/University Teacher Education Faculty

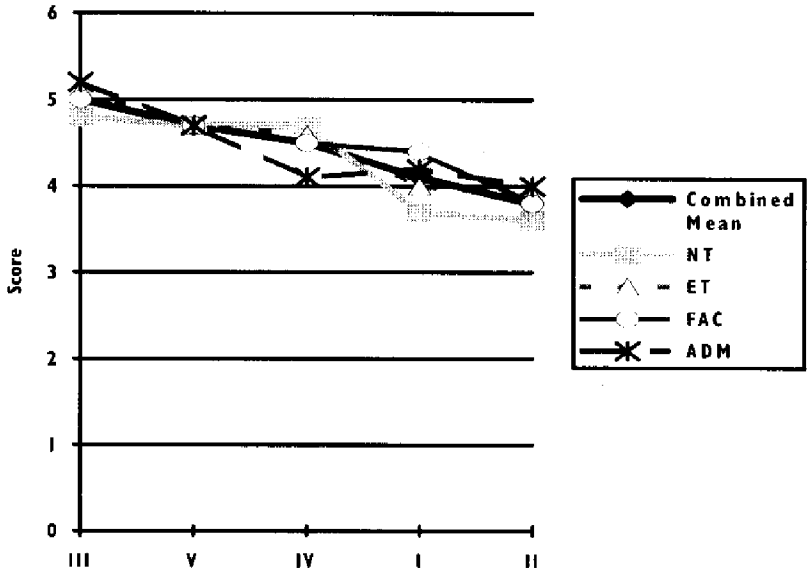
Results

Results of the two-way analysis of variance revealed a significant interaction between role group and dimension ($F = 4.07$, $df = 12/604$, $p < .05$), suggesting that each role group might be endorsing the five support domains with different orders of preference (see Figure 1). In order to sort out the relative preference of each domain of activity for each role group, the simple effects for differences between domains were computed for each role group separately.

All of the simple effects were significant at $p < .05$. Accordingly, post-hoc tests (Kirk, 1995) were performed between mean domain scores within each group so as to determine which domains differed significantly from one another.

Based on the results of these post-hoc analyses, we found that new teachers were significantly more likely to prefer activities in the "Interactive," "Personal

Figure 1



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Growth," and "Staff Development" domains as compared to the "Reflective" and "Non-interactive" domains. On average, they endorsed activities from the former three domains as being "very" important while those in the latter were only "somewhat" important.

By contrast, the patterns for the experienced educators, while similar to the new teachers, differed in emphasis. Thus, within all groups of experienced educators, the "Interactive" domain was significantly preferred (rated on average between "very" and "extremely" important) over all others. Recall that the new teachers had given equal emphasis to the "Interactive" domain along with the "Personal Growth" and "Staff Development" domains, rating them on average between "somewhat" and "very" important. Beyond their universal preference for the "Interactive" domain, however, each of the groups of experienced educators varied somewhat in their patterns of preference among the remaining four domains of activities.

For the experienced teachers, activities from the "Personal Growth" and "Staff Development" dimensions were next most highly valued after those from the "Interactive" domain and were significantly more highly valued than those from the "Reflective" and "Non-interactive" domains. Administrators, on the other hand, valued "Staff Development" next most strongly after "Interactive" activities, not significantly distinguishing between "Reflective," "Non-interactive," and "Personal Growth" (all valued on average as only "somewhat" important.)

College faculty, by contrast, gave ratings that showed no significant preference for activities from any one of the "Reflective," "Personal Growth," and "Staff Development" domains. All the former were, however, significantly more strongly endorsed as compared to "Non-interactive" activities, which were rated as between "a little" to "somewhat" important.

Discussion

From the analysis of these surveys, it was interesting to note that there was strong consensus among role groups. All five dimensions were valued somewhat by all groups. However, there were subtle but statistically significant differences between dimensions in weight of perceived value. Refer to Table 2 for a summary of differences of perceived value across and between role groups.

Most and Least Effective Practices

Patterns of perceived effective practices were surprisingly congruent across groups. "Interactive" practices, such as lesson observation and conferencing, coaching, and team teaching teacher buddies and teacher portfolios were perceived by all groups as the most effective set of practices to use in teacher induction programs. The practices perceived to be the least effective for new teachers were also agreed upon by all groups. All groups found the least value in Non-Interactive activities such as a help-line, assess to assist, videotapes, and newsletters. They also

tended to value less the more reflective strategies of journals, clinical supervision, critical incident summaries, case studies, and integration of research.

The literature on teacher socialization and development is congruent with the findings of this study and the implications for working with novice teachers. Mentor coaches are highly regarded for their teaching expertise and their assistance in supporting novice teachers. The preferred mode of support is interpersonal, as opposed to reflective. Beginning teachers are socialized into the profession by their relationships with colleagues who provide the single greatest influence (Jordell, 1987). Coaches provide beginning teachers with personal, practical knowledge about their craft and situationally-specific assistance in working with students and parents and dealing with the school environment (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). Beginning teachers most value the emotional support that they receive from colleagues (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Appropriate preparation for mentoring roles and scheduling time to assist new teachers were cited as concerns in a study

Table 2

Differences of Perceived Values across Role Groups

	NT	ET	ADM	FAC
Very to Extremely Important		◆ Interactive	◆ Interactive	◆ Interactive
Somewhat to Very Important	◆ Interactive ◆ Personal Growth ◆ Staff Development	◆ Personal Growth ◆ Staff Development	◆ Staff Development	◆ Reflective ◆ Personal Growth ◆ Staff Development
Little to Somewhat Important	◆ Reflective ◆ Non-interactive	◆ Reflective ◆ Non-interactive	◆ Reflective ◆ Non-interactive ◆ Personal Growth	◆ Non-interactive

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by Fullan (1993) and need to be carefully considered in designing successful induction programs.

Differences of Perception

It is interesting to note that the Interactive dimension activities of coaching and mentoring were deemed the most important across all role groups. However, new teachers did not perceive Interactive activities to be "very to extremely important" as did the experienced teachers, administrators, and college/university faculty. In fact, it was perplexing that new teachers did not rate any of the dimensions as "very to extremely important." This seems to us to be an important area to investigate further.

Another difference emerged from the school district administrators. Whereas new teachers, experienced teachers, and college/university faculty ranked the Personal Growth dimension as "somewhat to very important," administrators placed this dimension as their lowest priority. This may be attributed to the fact that teachers, especially new teachers, have professional needs and feel these more intensely. Lacking such professional interaction, new teachers become isolated from other teachers, which reduces their capacity for further personal and professional growth. Administrators, on the other hand, may be more concerned with the collective whole of the school and general staff development concerns (California Department of Education and Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1992). The administrative respondents in another study recognized the powerful role that school culture plays in affecting relationships of new teachers and the teaching environment (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Accordingly, building a professional culture of teaching needs to be an administrative priority to counteract the professional isolation in the classroom (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

Conclusions

1. **The most effective perceived practices for induction into teaching favor interactive activities and a tradition of apprenticeship and mentoring.** This is consistent with the research that shows that interacting with colleagues in making decisions and in developing programs helps new teachers feel more positively about themselves as new teachers (California Department of Education and Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1992). The first year of teaching or the entry into many professions is a time of both survival and discovery (Huberman, 1989). Survival deals with the complexity and simultaneity of instructional and management demands. One is preoccupied with self and asks, "Am I up to this challenge?" Discovery comes with the enthusiasm of one's own classroom, own students, and own program and curriculum. One is becoming a colleague among peers and looks to experts for external confirmation of being a teacher. Coaching, lesson observations with conferencing, and team teaching all support the socialization of the new

teacher to the teaching profession. They are identity-reinforcing practices. Mentoring and coaching have also been shown to increase self-confidence and motivation in new teachers (Odell & Ferraro, 1992) and instructional effectiveness (Schaffer, Stringfield & Wolfe, 1992).

However, contrived collegiality, imposed by others, is cautioned against (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1992). Collaborative cultures cannot be legislated. Seeking willing colleagues for support is of primary concern to the respondents in this study. Participants indicated that their schools and districts have begun to provide first-year teachers with various support networks, including mentor relationships with experienced coaches.

Many of the new teachers in this study indicated that they would like to observe other teachers but rarely have that opportunity. The effects of classroom isolation and the new teacher's anxiety about effectiveness and concern with external evaluation have been noted (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), even though the positive effects of teacher collaboration and collegiality on successful teaching practice have also been well documented (Johnson, 1990; Little, 1982).

2. **The practices perceived as least effective involve non-interactive activities and self-analytical exploration.** Journaling, writing critical incidents, case studies, and applying research to their practice all require "reflection about teaching" (Schön 1983, 1987, 1991). These self-analytic activities seem to be powerful tools during the preservice education phase of teacher development when the student teacher is forming his or her personal metaphor about being a teacher. During the induction years, however, new teachers appear to prefer the "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1991) that comes with collegial interaction during team teaching and coaching (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991).

3. **The portfolio activity drew a range of support among the role groups.** As a strategy for support, portfolio process is rated near the midpoint among the 20 activities. There was a difference among role group perceptions; among the activities in the Interactive dimension, the teacher portfolio was valued least by new teachers and most by school administrators and college faculty.

Implications for Support Providers: Teacher Educators, District Coaches, and Mentors

These findings suggest that it may be appropriate to use the portfolio as a tool in preservice education to facilitate the development of a teacher's philosophy, emerging identity, and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Subsequently, it may be well to wait two years in the use of a teacher portfolio to make time for induction activities that are externally driven. A more experienced teacher might return to a more self-reflective process during the third year of teaching after the survival and discovery phase of teaching is accomplished. When a teacher is ready for experi-

mentation, reflection about teaching and reflection in the act of teaching will likely be of higher value. This is consistent with the findings of the California New Teacher Project evaluation that two or more years of training and coaching are necessary for new teachers to become highly reflective about their teaching (California Department of Education and Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1992).

The findings suggest that allocation of resources support the continuance of coaching, mentoring, and seminars as primary areas for teacher support activities. The major investment in the portfolio process, however, needs to be reexamined in light of the possibility that it is most advantageous in the preservice and post-induction process of teacher development.

Preparing teachers requires a long-term, integrated, systematic approach which extends from undergraduate preparation through the novice years of teaching. Assisting beginning teachers in their development toward becoming competent professionals is critically important if we are to strengthen K-12 education.

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