

Fitting in and Learning To Teach: Tensions in Developing a Vision for a University-Based Induction Program for Beginning Teachers

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Developing and retaining highly qualified teachers are central elements in efforts to improve teaching and learning in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As part of these efforts, higher education institutions are beginning to design comprehensive induction programs for their graduates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). One example: through the Teachers for a New Era initiative (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001), Michigan State University has embraced the challenge to design a seamless teacher preparation program that begins with planned learning experiences designed for entering freshmen, extends throughout a year-long internship and into the first two years in a beginning teacher's own classroom. This formal induction component is based on the belief that after completing the initial teacher preparation certification program, beginning teachers are merely at the *beginning* of the process of learning to teach. As a distinct phase in learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser,

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2001), induction can “stand as a key juncture of learning, growth, and support” for those beginning their careers as teachers (Paine, Pimm, Britton, Raizen, & Wilson, 2003, p. 15).

This key juncture provides a new opportunity for developing partnerships between K-12 schools and universities in ways that respect and value the uniqueness that each institution offers while together working toward the goal of developing high quality teachers for K-12 schools. A continuing challenge, however, is bringing the worlds of theory and practice together, a challenge made even more visible as university faculty and K-12 teachers work to collaboratively design, from the ground-up, an induction experience for beginning teachers.

Defining our Vision of Induction

The purpose of this article is to describe the development of a conceptual framework for a university-supported induction component of a teacher education program. Our university has not played a prominent role in providing formal support during the induction years. Like most other universities, once teacher education students graduate, responsibility for their learning has been turned over to school districts that are mandated, but not necessarily prepared, to provide induction support. While some schools encourage professional learning sustained by collaborative work among veterans and novices, others reinforce isolation as new teachers are left to figure things out for themselves (Johnson & Kardos, 2002). Guidance may also be provided by an assigned mentor, though the duties allocated to the role of a mentor vary and often involve becoming a “buddy” who gives advice and solves immediate problems with little or no discussion about continued learning to teach (Gordon & Maxey, 2000).

The literature on induction provides program descriptions (David, 2000; Davis, Resta, Higdon, & Latiolais, 2001) and advice for principals on ways to support new teachers (Weasmer & Woods, 1998) but presents few images of a university’s efforts to create an induction program that extends the ideas begun in preservice teacher education while novices are within varying school contexts (Auger & Odell, 1992; Johnson, Clift, & Klecka, 2002; Resta, Huling, White, & Matschek, 1997). We believe that university teacher educators can make valuable contributions in defining and designing support for beginning teachers that compliments and extends school district support (Gold, 1996). Even well-prepared novices have critical learning needs during their first years and can benefit from substantive assistance in developing strategies for continuing to learn to teach (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003). Indeed, a university-school partnership can help beginning teachers use their experiences in the classroom to develop a reflective stance on their teaching, one that can benefit both their practice and their students’ learning (Wood, 2001).

Developing an Induction Vision with K-12 Educators

Our dilemma in developing a university-based induction experience was being responsive to beginning teacher needs while also challenging them to develop a framework for their thinking and asking them to consider new perspectives about what it means to teach. As we see induction, the primary goal is to prepare strong teachers who participate in a community of educators and over time become leaders in their schools, districts, and the broader educational community. To construct a conceptual framework for university-based induction support experiences, an advisory board consisting of first-year graduates from our program, veteran teacher leaders, and retired teachers and administrators worked with us. With input from the advisory board we developed a draft of outcomes that would guide induction support. Through participation in induction experiences, beginning teachers would learn about: (1) knowing students in the classroom as unique learners; (2) managing classroom activities in ways that support a productive learning community; (3) establishing classroom norms that create a productive learning environment; (4) interacting with families and community to support school and learning goals; (5) continuing to deepen subject matter knowledge for teaching; (6) understanding curriculum trajectory across grade levels; (7) integrating assessment as a centerpiece for teaching and learning; (8) using professional judgment to make teaching decisions; and (9) developing as a teacher leader.

The advisory board recommended that we engage a group of practitioners and university faculty to design the actual curriculum for induction experiences around these outcomes, organized in a way that would promote our vision of continued growth as teachers. A university faculty committee supported this recommendation and encouraged us to provide experiences for graduates employed locally and at a distance. Thus, we decided to consider multiple components of support as possible options, including on-line resources, after-school seminars, full-day institutes, and various forms of mentoring.

Since practicing teachers were not available to devote the time needed for curriculum development, we hired 10 induction consultants—recently retired principals, central office administrators, mentor coordinators, and veteran teachers who had long served as mentors—to work together to flesh out an induction curriculum and report back to the advisory board. We advertised for consultants with curriculum development and mentoring experience who would be willing to try aspects of the induction curriculum with focus groups of beginning teachers, and who would have time to visit beginning teachers' classrooms to see whether the curriculum we were creating matched current challenges novices were facing in urban, rural and suburban classrooms.

Our first indicator of the challenge we faced in resolving the tensions between theory and practice was that the work with our consultants was much more

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complicated than we anticipated. Because they had not been part of the initial construction of the advisory board's vision, we spent time in conversations where participants felt like we were telling them about decisions already made rather than involving them in decision-making. Though we had intended that the consultants go into classrooms to see whether beginning teachers' challenges matched our outcomes and try out elements of our proposed curriculum, many put up roadblocks about working in schools. Their worries about liability issues ("what happens if I slip in the hallway?"), issues of power ("would I be usurping the role of the mentor if I get involved?"), and accountability ("who would I report to in the building?") led us to bring together focus groups of beginning teachers rather than go into the schools. Finally, our work was initially contentious as the consultants were adamant that the most critical part of induction involved helping novices fit into existing school cultures, while our stance was focused on our goal to help novices continue learning to teach. For instance, in our conversations with the consultants, the notion of coming to know children as unique learners would become tangled with discussions on how to post norms for classroom behavior. Our practicing teachers challenged our preconceptions for induction; we responded by hoping they could consider other perspectives and tried to build a bridge between both points of view while moving forward toward our goals for an induction program. These tensions had not been visible in our initial work with the advisory board, and added an important dimension to our work.

As the discussions unfolded, both university and school engaged in a normative-reeducative development process that promoted opportunities for learning and change (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & Placier, 2001). As university educators, we learned to step aside and really listen as the veterans described the essence of fitting in. We read together, shared experiences, and had very difficult conversations that valued the perspectives of all in the room. Through these shared experiences and open collaboration, collectively our underlying conceptual framework broadened to include both perspectives: helping novices learn ways to "fit in" to their school culture while continuing to learn to teach. Our work together resulted in three foundational areas that form the conceptual framework that defines our induction experiences: developing principled reasons for teaching decisions; learning to thoughtfully "fit in" to the teaching context; and being mentored to move beyond survival in the first year of teaching. The following sections describe these in detail including the tensions that led to decisions for the framework of the induction program.

Developing Principled Reasons for Teaching Decisions

Working with K-12 educators helped make our vision of the university role in induction much clearer. For example, Michigan State University preservice expe-

periences include field observations as juniors; a year-long senior seminar connected to a four-hour a week field experience where each student works with a mentor teacher; and a year-long postgraduate intern program, where the student co-teaches with a collaborating teacher, takes part with fellow interns in faculty-led supporting courses, and is observed and mentored by a university field instructor. Throughout each of these experiences, preservice teachers engage in reflective conversations about teaching and learning with fellow students, collaborating teachers, and university educators. They learn that working with others productively shapes their ideas for the classroom by challenging them to think about how they engage in teaching and learning and assists them in confronting and managing their struggles. This frame guided how university faculty thought about finding a place in induction. In a profession that is pervasively isolating, our plan was to extend these norms of collaboration and support into the induction years and as a result accelerate teacher development (Moir, 2004) so that novices could have an impact on student achievement earlier in their career. In contrast, however, many of the veteran teachers from the field urged us to consider casting our induction program within a framework of efficiency, order, and control.

To gain some shared insight into this apparent dichotomy and to find out what beginning teachers considered important, we held several half-day focus groups with beginning teachers, induction consultants, and university faculty. In the focus groups, led by the induction consultants, the beginning teachers voiced the need for collaboration, connections to people who helped to prepare them, and further learning. For example, one teacher lamented the fact that she could no longer easily access some of the library resources referenced in her undergraduate work as she now realized how useful some of them would be in helping her address classroom issues. Another beginning teacher hoped to have an experienced teacher or fellow novice observe her to gain another perspective on her teaching. As we analyzed these different perspectives of learning to teach, we came to realize that we had to move past the visible parts of practice many of the veterans wanted to see, such as setting up the classroom for efficiency as a first priority, implementing superficial checks for understanding, and reinforcing the notion that clear procedures and routines in the classroom would automatically lead to learning. Yet we had to honor the consultants' insistence that we emphasize the importance of strategies to help classrooms run smoothly. In doing so, we argued for space to help novices understand that a framework of core values involving their beliefs about teaching and learning should underlie their decisions about setting up and managing a classroom.

In the process, however, we learned more about the current realities of teaching. Through our conversations with induction consultants and beginning teachers, we came to understand that our view of formative assessment as a way to shape instruction based on student thinking (Black & Wilhelm, 1998) was complicated by lack of freedom for strong teaching practice due to pressure imposed by state tests and struggles to adapt to system structures such as team targets for learning or pacing

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guides that define the delivery of content over time. Furthermore, as we worked to define what it means when a student is on task and learning within a particular content area, the veterans continued to separate content from management in ways that challenged us to broaden our views on helping novices develop strong management practices.

Indeed our induction consultants agreed with others who have studied beginning teacher challenges (Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002; Stanulis, Fallona & Pearson, 2002; Veenman, 1984) that classroom management is a primary concern of novices as they enter the first year of teaching. The consultants were eager to lay out a list of strategies and techniques to hand first-year teachers as a guide for setting up their classroom. Our focus was to think about how our induction program could move beyond surface fixes or a set of tricks to keep order in a classroom and instead help beginning teachers think about why they do what they do as they teach. We understood the lens our consultants brought with them; but just as they challenged us about the realities of practice, we needed to challenge them to consider different possibilities for beginning teacher learning. Without our prodding, their views of supporting teachers rarely included attention to issues of content and how routines and procedures might differ depending on the discipline. For example, an initial plan developed by the consultants for a workshop on the opening day of school began with a lecture about teaching procedures and routines for the first day of school. This included a discussion of how routines and procedures are different from planning to teach a content lesson, the importance of consistency, infusing one's own personal style into the procedures, and a video of different teachers giving advice about the first day of school. According to the plan for the workshop, the beginning teachers would create one procedure, record how to teach it, and share with others for feedback and discussion. Our perspective was that, while these ideas are important in helping a new teacher succeed with classroom management, the procedure should always be clearly contextualized within a content area and not treated like a generic part of learning to teach. Their plan recognized that our vision of coming to know students as learners had a place, but the comfort level for detailing activities was clearly around routines apart from content or learning.

To help us move towards a shared vision, university faculty and K-12 induction consultants together attended a half-day workshop titled "Working with New Teachers on Classroom and Behavior Management: A Framework and Method for Matching Supports to Need" (Mayer, 2005). The experiences in the workshop encouraged everyone to begin to look at more than quick fixes by helping teachers develop some general principles to guide their actions, specific strategies to use, and a set of tools they could invoke (such as writing a learning contract or establishing peer tutoring). Mayer's framework emphasized management that focuses on students and their learning rather than management for behavior. He suggested that management problems in classrooms should be considered from a variety of lenses: academic readiness, relationships between students, motivational

issues, personal situations, immediate needs, and so on. Within this context, using short clips of practice, we discussed what led to the situation, what would be gained by a solution strategy, and what the consequences might be. He had us take a step back and view the issue from new points of reference. The new points of reference call for critical thinking and reflection, as well as strategies that can help novices handle a situation, within the context of a larger understanding of the issues that might relate to the problem origin. As a result of the workshop, our induction consultants began to talk about ways in which management begins from the big picture of students and their learning, moves to the particular instance for a given student, and then back again, to reflect on the larger goal. This new lens of helping beginning teachers develop classroom management strategies within a framework of core teaching and learning beliefs provided the foundation for the management component of our induction curriculum.

As we worked with the K-12 consultants to develop an induction curriculum, the veterans emphasized the need for developing strategies for beginning teachers that could be immediately applied to their work as teachers. At first we resisted this just in time learning, but now are beginning to see the importance of being able to respond to immediate needs of novices (e.g., open house, parent-teacher conferences) at the same time as we encourage them to think beyond the next day in their classroom. We encourage them to move to a place where they can think about what is going on in the larger picture of the classroom, what is working for them as teachers and for their students as learners. As novices develop this consciousness about their teaching, our induction experiences focus on helping them develop principled reasons for why they are doing what they are doing. Although we may not see evidence of this movement in their practice right away, it is our intent to plant seeds that can grow through sustained interactions with other novices, veterans, and university faculty throughout the two-year induction period.

Resolving these tensions led to a clearer understanding of ways to frame the substantive work within each outcome, based on the needs of beginning teachers and the realities of practice. As we worked to give substance to each of the nine outcomes, we advocated for images of principled practice (Grossman, 1990) where novices could talk about reasons for teaching decisions within a safe community of colleagues while continuing to learn to teach.

Learning to Thoughtfully “Fit in” to the Teaching Context

As we considered a productive role for Michigan State University faculty in supporting beginning teachers in continued learning to teach, we realized that we could not do it all: we cannot know the uniqueness of each district; we cannot help each novice fit in to a specific school context and learn the norms and daily routines in each site. But what we could emphasize in our program was helping novices learn

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to think, to talk, to question their practices, to look in retrospect for patterns in their actions and to look forward to map out strategies for improvement in enabling students to learn. Toward that end, our framework for induction work includes both fitting in to the school context and learning to teach, both critical to novice teacher growth. Throughout our program, we want to keep an eye toward growing teacher leaders who maintain and develop deep visions of who they are as teachers and why they do what they do.

The concept of fitting in is complex. Most of our K-12 consultants firmly believed that novices just adapt during their first years. Often given the most challenging teaching assignments, privy to information sometimes only if they ask, finding out they missed a deadline because nobody told them, beginning teachers are asked to bide their time and not muddy the waters until they are tenured. For example, one beginning teacher was thrilled to receive a complete syllabus for the course she was to teach, thinking she was working with a carefully designed and well articulated set of activities only to find on inspection that it was the chapter headings from a textbook. If we leave the fitting in aspect of learning to teach to districts, we could be in a sense sabotaging our induction program. Yet if we push our novices to be cleverly subversive we may be dooming them to isolation and confrontation in the schools.

Beginning teachers we have talked to over two and a half years of induction program development (n=approximately 130) have clearly asked for our help in forging networks where they can connect with other beginning teachers and university faculty. We believe that we can best help them fit in to their schools and to the profession by involving them in a collaborative network with other early career teachers who are working to challenge the adapt and fit in norms of teaching. Together novices can talk about issues of finding their voice within their school and can hold onto and propel the reform-based ideas with which they have become familiar as students in our teacher preparation program. For example, one first-year teacher had plans for how to arrange her classroom in ways she felt would enhance learning; but as she walked through the halls, she observed the other classrooms had desks arranged in rows and were designed for order and control. She bowed to the subtle pressure to “fit in,” until the second year, after support from colleagues who were not in her building encouraged her to establish the environment she believed would best contribute to student learning.

To help beginning teachers cope with these tensions and be able to share their ideas and concerns, one component of our induction program is an on-line chat room. In keeping with our vision of both responding to beginning teachers’ immediate needs and pushing them to become reflective practitioners, the chat room provides opportunities for novices to raise questions, to respond to timely issues identified as part of the induction work, and to take part in focused discussions with faculty from arts and sciences on relevant topics. In addition, interns doing their fieldwork are invited to take part in conversations with beginning teachers about the transition from being a student at the university to becoming a teacher in a K-12 classroom. The intention

is to network students still in the university setting, beginning teachers, and more experienced teachers along with university faculty to provide opportunities for conversation about issues in teaching from multiple perspectives.

Being Mentored to Move Beyond Survival in the First Year

The selection and preparation of mentors who are focused on helping novices learn to teach is a critical part of induction (Gless, 2004). This is difficult to enact in our state, which has an authorized “un-funded mandate” regarding new teacher induction and mentoring programs. Districts are required to provide new teachers with a mentor and 15 days of professional development during the first three years of teaching experience. The standards governing these programs call for districts to offer quality professional development, meet teaching and learning standards, sustain a community of learners, attend to cultural proficiency, and provide the resources to support program implementation and evaluation (Michigan Department of Education, 2004). However, decisions about how mentors are selected, prepared, released from their classroom, and compensated are left to districts already sagging from the weight of other state and national initiatives. Too often the role of mentor is unspecified and ill conceived. In many instances, mentors are primarily charged with the fitting in aspect of support for beginning teachers. Few schools see that creating a quality induction program can make a tremendous difference in teacher satisfaction, growth, retention and impact on students (Ingersoll, 2001). Many mentors and administrators are convinced that novices only want emotional support, help with management, quick fixes, and day-to-day information during the first year. However, data collected in a year-long study of mentor and novice pairs indicate that beginning teachers long for conversations about practice that mentors are ignoring. For example, one first- year teacher talked about how she longed to talk about more than management with her mentor:

We just work so hard at the beginning of the year setting up that management so that we can really get into the curriculum . . . but [now] really my main focus is curriculum . . . how am I supposed to plan everything . . . and then I would love to be focused on differentiating. [But] I don't feel like I can even look at differentiating, even though I want to. And I feel like I'm neglecting some of my kids' needs by not differentiating, or not pushing people to their potential. (Stanulis, Meloche, & Ames, 2006)

Another beginning teacher tried to ask for curricular help but was ignored by his mentor. In fact, the mentor told us: “I got an email from him that was like, ‘Can you help me with the CD, the music part. . .and then there was sort of this P.S., ‘Also will you help me with the next science unit?’ But the CD was more important right now and the science part, let's get to that whenever” (Stanulis et al., 2006). This same beginning teacher was uncertain about whom to ask for help with the mathematics

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curriculum he was expected to teach and where to find resources to help him do so. Largely because of testimony from beginning teachers and studying exemplary mentoring practices (Feiman-Nemser, 1992; Shulman, 2004; Stanulis, 1994; Wang & Odell, 2002), our primary goal in mentoring is to support veterans in developing a practice of mentoring that builds from and continues the support and collaborative practices our beginning teachers experienced in the Michigan State University preservice program. This means developing mentors who move beyond providing support as in “how’s it going?” (Stanulis et al., 2006) and into complex and thought-provoking conversations that surround the practice of teaching. Our aim is to enable mentors to respond to beginning teachers’ needs and help fit in to school and district and professional norms but to do so in the context of stimulating and supporting them to become thoughtful teachers making teaching decisions based on a framework designed for student learning. One component of our induction program is to prepare mentors to take on instructional roles where they challenge beginning teachers about their conceptions of what students are actually learning, help beginning teachers transform, see, and talk about what is problematic and inquire about ways to improve.

Next Steps:

Moving Forward with Our Vision

Our work has challenged us to think more carefully about the type of induction we will provide for our graduates. We believe that the right induction components can promote teacher learning and improve teacher quality that will affect students for years to come (Britton et al., 2003). Through the work with consultants, we both changed and sharpened our focus on the three foundational ideas of having beginning teachers develop principled reasons for their teaching while learning how to fit in to schools and continuing to learn to teach, with the guidance and support of well-prepared mentors. We now recognize, with the prompting of our consultants, that we cannot ignore the veteran-oriented culture that exists in many schools (Johnson & Kardos, 2002). We know we have to listen and be open to multiple perspectives as our shared goal remains to prepare teachers who will become leaders in the field. Our induction program is designed to help novices understand the culture that exists in schools and ways to work within the culture without losing their identity as emerging professionals.

The design of our outcomes and induction experiences was influenced by this important collaboration and reeducative change process. For example, we now have moved managing classroom activities and establishing norms that create a productive learning community as more central in initial induction experiences. In the end, we combined several of the outcomes together and discussed ways that the outcomes could be revisited across two years in a spiral fashion as teachers develop. We found that although our outcomes mirror the work of Feiman-Nemser (2001) and

the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, it was important to undergo the process of university and school working together to construct our outcomes and conceptual framework and make them our own, understanding what is involved with each of the outcomes in our own context of induction.

Our vision will include tasks where beginning teachers continue the learning they began in their preservice experiences about how to focus professional discussions around practice by examining student work, analyzing videos of teaching, creating assessments, and developing curriculum in order to help build an inquiry stance towards their own practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). The program will emphasize helping beginning teachers understand the uniqueness of their local context and the importance of knowledge of districts, schools, and communities; providing structures for developing effective mentors and structures for effective mentoring practices; and fostering and supporting development of teacher knowledge and teacher learning. The program will continually assess the value-added component a university can bring to an induction initiative, inducing us to ask ourselves: What do we have to offer? What do schools need in an induction program that is currently difficult for them to supply?

Conclusion

The tensions that emerged in designing our induction program have forced us to think harder about reconciling theory (from the university perspective) and classroom practice. Pushing versus fitting in, mentors as buddies versus mentors who emphasize learning to teach, managing classrooms for efficiency versus organizing classrooms for learning, and general advice structures versus content-based strategies were issues with which we struggled. The advice and input of beginning teachers often conflicted with that of our experienced consultants. The beginning teachers exhibited an energy to succeed, an imagination about what it means to teach, and a desire to use the knowledge they gained in their preservice program to make a difference. Our consultants brought the wisdom of practice, repertoires, and strategies gained from experience, but they also brought the cynicism of reality. Our dilemma is to provide support for beginning teachers that enables them to both fit into their teaching context and to lay the foundation for their continual growth as professionals, and to do so in ways that will be meaningful and that will enable them to focus their practice on student learning and to bring what they learn into their work.

What we have learned thus far in our work has been invaluable in helping us better understand how to support beginning teachers in ways that honor the context in which they work yet continue to promote their growth as professionals. As we move forward, our next challenge is to take the shared vision for induction created by university and school educators to scale within a local urban district, working within the system to mediate the tensions between our vision of mentoring and induction and existing mentoring structures. We hope that with continued careful

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collaboration and openness to change that the tensions between the university and the practitioner stances will evolve into a shared understanding of what it means to support teachers as they learn to teach. Documenting this evolution will not only provide us with information about how to be smarter about our work but will also provide guidance for other teacher educators as they embark on similar collaborative efforts with schools and teachers. While universities can and should play an important role in developing and retaining teachers as they begin their careers, informed conversations among teacher educators about how to develop and share this role together with practitioners will make a difference in how well we succeed.

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