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ABSTRACT

There is an exceedingly high rate of loss of beginning teachers in the field of public education. Out of the estimated 3.1 million teaching in the United States, 11 percent, or 341,000, quit after their first year of teaching. The data also have revealed that after 2 years, another 651,000 quit and at the 5-year mark, another 1,209,000 teachers leave the profession. Taken individually, the data may not gain the attention they deserve; however, when aggregated, the numbers become staggering. This paper explores the interrelatedness of mentoring and induction programs; presents the four dominant components of a quality induction program; suggests that mentoring is not a stand-alone experience, but rather an integral component of any induction program; strongly advocates a model based upon a multiple-year concept; proposes nine varied, yet intertwined, educational themes that should be part of such programs; and concludes with a series of strategies for not only amassing data to justify the existence of such programs, but also to assess their quality. (Author/SM)

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To Mentor or To Induct: That is the Question

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association in Chattanooga, Tennessee, November 6-9, 2002

TO MENTOR OR INDUCT: THAT IS THE QUESTION

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Introduction

With the advent of the newly authorized federal legislation, i.e., “No Child Left Behind”, education and, more specifically educational organizations and their leaders are coming under the new, brightly, shining spotlight of public accountability for student progress. Indeed, this is a concern that is justifiable, since that legislation for all intent and purpose has created a line in the sand and has said to educators no longer will failure of students to show/demonstrate adequate yearly progress be tolerated.

In order for educational organizations to address this expectation for improved student achievement, attention must first be focused on those responsible for leading instructional improvement, i.e., classroom teachers and principals. These are the important players in the process, for without proper support and leadership, how can teachers be expected to effectively perform their magic. This is certainly a truism, given that education is a highly focused people oriented endeavor. It is people interacting with people, i.e., teachers with students and principals with teachers, that produces desired educational outcomes. It is after all incumbent upon teachers to interact with students but more importantly the learning process is significantly impacted by having quality, experienced teachers interacting with students. For experience allows teachers to recognize special qualities and/or problems students may be facing that require special adaptations for learning to occur.

Yet, in order to move toward attaining the goal of student achievement, educational organizations and their leaders must first focus their attention on a more fundamental issue and that is the unacceptably high yearly loss of the primary teacher, the teacher and more importantly the beginning teacher. Given the fact that the current teaching population is graying and as such fast approaching retirement, newly employed teachers are becoming a significantly greater proportion of teaching ranks. National reports have indicated that out of an estimated 3.1 million teachers in the United States eleven percent or 341,000 quit after their first year of teaching. The data also has revealed that after two years another 651,000 quit and at the magical five-year mark another 1,209,000 teachers leave the profession (Ashford, 2000). Taken individually such data may not gain the attention it deserves but when aggregated the numbers become staggering. Imagine that in an average five-year period of the 3.1 million public school teachers nationally, a staggering 2.2 million will leave the teaching profession. Such a loss is dramatic and has a deleterious impact on the ability of public education to fulfill the mandated expectation that, "No child will be left behind."

Stemming the Tide

School organizations must face the reality that the issues of improving student achievement and acquiring / maintaining its teaching force are intertwined and as such improving the latter should have an impact on the former. While the focus for student achievement is at the building level, it is essential to recognize the importance of a commitment from the district office to implement efforts to increase teacher retention. To this end, district support needs to be in the form of providing financial resources, time,

and facilities for principals and their staffs to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of their induction and mentoring efforts.

If as stated previously, education is a highly people oriented endeavor and if time is a valuable commodity, then it stands to reason that it is better for a principal and his staff to expend energy, effort, and time on the front side of selecting, inducting, and mentoring the newly employed teacher as opposed to continuing to participate in revolving door recruitment efforts that destabilize schools and adversely effect student achievement. What then is induction? According to Wong (2001):

“Induction is the process of systematically training and supporting new teachers beginning before the first day of school and continuing through the first two or three years of teaching. It’s purposes include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) easing the transition into teaching, (2) improving teacher effectiveness through training in classroom management and effective teaching techniques, (3) promoting the district’s culture-its philosophies, missions, policies, procedures, and goals, and (4) increasing the retention rate for highly qualified teachers.”

Given this definition of induction, what then are the implications for the school principal/instructional leader? First of all, it is necessary for the principal to recognize that induction of newly employed teachers is not an activity that can be performed alone. Rather, the mentoring element is a planned and structured activity that is best done by the qualified, experienced teacher matched with the newly employed teacher. The principal however, must support such efforts by selecting those members of his teaching staff that possess the skills, abilities, and experience necessary to function in such a capacity. Additionally, the principal must provide the opportunity for the mentor and mentoree to have the time to meet, observe, model and discuss effective teaching practices for extended periods of time. Specific details of such functions are better left to another

discussion as the primary focus of this article is the importance and design of quality induction efforts to increase the retention of newly employed teachers.

Based upon Wong's definition, a quality induction program must first have as its focus a long-term or multiple year perspective, if it is to achieve its desired goals of both retaining teachers and improving instruction. Frequently, schools have forgotten this emphasis and have at best offered time for only several opportunities of induction activities prior to the beginning of the school year or periodic activities dispersed over a one-year time frame. In effect this is similar to providing the new teachers with swimming suits and then throwing them into the deep end of the pool and telling them to swim. Such efforts for the most part have the potential for not only causing the new teachers to drown, but to also, and more importantly, impede student learning, which after all is the primary function of education.

Once the commitment has been made to a multiple year, on-going induction program, the next issue to address is for the principal to work collaboratively with his selected mentors to detail the sequence and content of training issues to be addressed. Among possible themes can be the following topics/issues, namely: (1) helping the new teacher develop an understanding of the school's culture, traditions, and rituals, (2) learning more about the nature and goals for education as held by the community, (3) gaining insight into district and school policies and/or procedures, (4) learning how to adjust the teachers' instructional delivery to better meet the needs and dispositions of individual students, (5) enhancing the skills and abilities of the teachers to engage students in higher level learning experiences, (6) aiding the teacher in gaining skill and insight in how to collect, analyze, and utilize data to make more informed decisions

regarding planning instructional opportunities for students, (7) making use of existing technologies available within the school to supplement / improve instructional delivery, (8) understanding the need to insure a systemic approach to instructional delivery, such as between grade levels and/or subject areas, and (9) gaining a knowledge of how district and building efforts must blend with state and national standards and curriculum frameworks to insure that what is tested is indeed being taught.

Assessing Induction Program Effectiveness

Assuming that school districts and school buildings implement induction programs, how then can the effectiveness of such efforts be ascertained? The answer to this question lies in the hands of the building principal to again work with his induction-mentoring staff to design, collect, analyze, report progress, and where necessary, make needed modifications. Utilizing the proffered definition of induction, the following strategies can be employed to assess program progress and make modifications when and where necessary, namely:

1. Easing the transition into teaching
 - a. Quarterly administration of attitudinal surveys employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative design, to address issues and problem areas encountered by teachers.
 - b. Identified areas of concern need to be addressed immediately by the induction-mentor teams to reduce or alleviate teacher dissatisfaction.
2. Improving teaching effectiveness in classroom management and instructional delivery

- a. Monitoring the number and types of disciplinary referrals to the office, mentor logging of observational data relative to instructional delivery, and analysis of teacher-made and state mandated standardized test results.
 - b. Trend analysis will indicate the type and direction of needed intervention strategies.
3. Promoting the district's culture
- a. The induction-mentoring group should pose topics for new teachers to submit written reflections regarding various interactions inside and outside the school setting, e.g. following attendance or participation in extra curricular activities, etc.
 - b. Analysis (not grading) of the reflections can guide the induction-mentoring team toward additional insight into the individual's understanding and comfort with the organization's climate.
4. Increasing the retention rate of employed teachers
- a. Of the components of this induction definition, this one is the easiest to assess in that the building principal and his team need only examine on a yearly basis the retention rate of employed teachers. Although, along with such data, it is possible to derive additional insights from departing teachers via a structured anonymous exit survey.
 - b. Results of the retention analysis should be annually reported to the district superintendent and the Board of Education. Additionally, derived teacher exit survey findings need to also be reported and

where appropriate organizational and/or induction program modifications should be incorporated.

Conclusion

Given that education is truly a people oriented experience and one that relies on the quality of involved parties to achieve its goals, it is vital for such recognition to not be lost by the organization. To this end, the application of the economic principle of *cost-benefit analysis* comes into play. That is to say, teachers should be considered an asset to the organization to which time and resources are invested. Thus, the finding, selecting, and inducting of new teachers into educational organizations represents a significant expense and one that should not be repeated unnecessarily. Unfortunately, all too frequently this fact would seem to have been lost on many educational enterprises, as substantiated by the dismal rate of new teacher retention. The nation will continue to experience significant losses such that eventually the demand for teachers will outstrip the supply. At that point in time, not even alternative certification programs will be able to stem the tide. In the end students will suffer.

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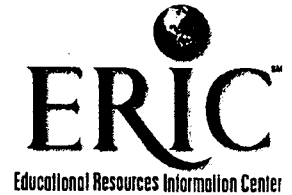
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This presentation will explore the interrelatedness of mentoring and induction programs, present the four dominant components of a quality induction program, suggest that mentoring is not a stand alone experience but rather an integral component of any induction program, strongly advocate a model based upon a multiple-year concept, propose nine varied, yet intertwined educational themes that should be part of such programs, and finally, conclude with a series of strategies for not only amassing data to justify the existence of such programs but also to assess their quality.



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