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What happens when induction goes wrong: Case studies from the field

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Abstract: Although induction programmes are widely held to alleviate the pressures beginning teachers face early in their careers, what happens when beginning teachers do not receive adequate induction? While the research advocates effective and ongoing induction to acculturate new teachers to their careers, there is little research on the effects of unsuccessful induction on the teachers who undertake such programmes. The author is a long-standing advocate for beginning teacher induction, it is important to note that simply implementing a programme does not guarantee success. While induction practices have become more common in recent years, there are still no mandated structures for inducting teachers into the profession throughout Australia, although guidelines are forthcoming. This article showcases the types of programmes that some schools have implemented in the wake of “mandated” induction and the impacts that these programmes have on the teachers who undertake them. The negative effects on teacher morale and efficacy, when they are not supported in the early years of their careers, are highlighted to justify the importance of effective and ongoing induction. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to understand and interpret the ways in which the participants of the programmes experienced their induction. This analysis along with the content analysis of the interviews with the school’s leadership and a document review of the policies and procedures of induction provided detailed insight into the nature, purpose, strengths and shortcomings of the programmes in question.

Subjects: Education; Education Policy & Politics; School Effectiveness & Improvement; School Leaders & Managers; School Leadership, Management & Administration

Keywords: induction; beginning teachers; Australia

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper provides a detailed illustration of the need for effective and ongoing induction worldwide and, more specifically, in the current Australian context. Through an analysis of ineffective induction, the article illuminates the negative effects improper induction can have on teachers’ efficacy and morale with regard to their new profession. An attempt is made to highlight that not all induction is beneficial and that when beginning teachers are not given the necessary support early in their careers the impact can be quite destructive to their morale. Finally, this paper provides recommendations about improving induction processes to better support teachers, specifically in Australia, but also relevant in the international context, to remain in the profession and become the expert teachers that are needed.

1. Introduction

This paper presents qualitative evidence of the impact of improper induction, from two different programmes, on the teachers who have undergone such induction. While there is an abundance of evidence from the field on the impacts of effective and ongoing induction for beginning teachers, there is little in the way of highlighting the effects of inadequate programmes on the professional and personal lives of beginning teachers. The necessity for quality induction is evident in the literature, and while others have reported on the effects of induction, both positive and negative (see Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), the current study uses case study analysis to better understand the negative effects of induction on those who are exposed to those practices.

The study examined a number of induction programmes in various schools in New South Wales, Australia to understand the types of induction programmes that were being implemented and the impacts of those programmes on beginning teachers. The current paper examines two programmes that were deemed ineffective at meeting the needs of the beginning teachers. The purpose of this article is not to highlight worst practice, nor to emphasise what not to do in induction; rather, it seeks to further stress the importance of effective and ongoing induction by exposing the detrimental effects of inadequate induction on beginning teachers.

2. Background

There is no doubt that teaching is a tough profession and one that continues to grow in complexity (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Recent political activity in Australia has seen National Professional Standards for Teachers implemented in the past few years; proposals to raise university entry scores for initial teacher education, which will be enforced in NSW in 2016; and, exit tests in literacy and numeracy for prospective teachers to ensure they are in the top 30% of the population. Additionally, initial teacher education programmes must be accredited with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the demands on those programmes is ever increasing.

Despite the political debate surrounding these initiatives, most educators would agree that raising the standards for teachers is a positive step and should help improve student achievement in the classroom. Within these initiatives there is an underlying theme to improve the quality of teachers in the classroom; however, there is a distinct lack of addressing beginning teacher induction into the workforce. National guidelines are currently being drawn up addressing induction and while this can be seen as a step in the right direction, the guidelines will not mandate induction. Consequently, it will be left to schools to either follow those guidelines or continue with current practice, which is sometimes inadequate at meeting beginning teachers' needs.

While governments' interventions in education do not always end positively (see Straker, Harris, & Zandvliet, 2000), that does not seem to deter state and national governments in Australia from implementing more stringent controls over the teaching profession. The government has instituted national literacy and numeracy tests for all teacher education students, which only the NSW state government has made compulsory before those students can embark on their final year professional experience placement in a school. There is, however, no empirical evidence that these tests will have the carry-on effect to raise literacy and numeracy achievement levels in schools, which is one of the goals of the various initiatives. The NSW Government has also implemented new standards for entry into initial teacher education (ITE). The government, and more specifically, the Minister for Education, believes this will improve the standard of teachers entering schools for which again, there is no evidence. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest the opposite: that the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) scores do not equal success at university (Chase & Jacobs, 1989; Graham, 1991; Johnes, 1990; Larose & Roy, 1991; Riggs & Riggs, 1990).

Another aspect of the reforms to improve the quality of teaching throughout the state, is that by 2017 all teachers in NSW will be "grand-fathered" in to what was, at the time it was implemented in

2004, called the “new scheme”. All teachers who started teaching after October 2004 are already in the “new scheme” and this new initiative will bring all teachers in the state under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, have to pay an annual accreditation fee and complete 100 h of mandated professional development every five years to maintain their accreditation.

While these initiatives can all be seen as positive steps to professionalising teaching, researchers and educators who understand the importance of induction, might be surprised that beginning teacher induction is not part of the improvement programme. The government’s bureaucratic oversight for initial teacher education programmes and the standards that guide the profession can all be seen as trying to make a positive impact on the profession, although it’s too early to tell. In one area, where there is empirical evidence to suggest that teaching can be improved and help keep our best teachers in the profession, the national government is taking, what can only be called symbolic action, in creating guidelines. While national guidelines, as previously mentioned, are a good first step, we are yet to see how these will be encouraged and or implemented by each of the states.

3. Induction

Effective and ongoing induction is widely held as one of the most worthwhile practices to ease the transition from university into the profession and counteract difficulties faced by beginning teachers (Gujarati, 2012; Kang & Berliner, 2012; Kearney, 2013; Serpell, 2000; Wojnowski, Bellamy, & Cooke, 2003). While high attrition rates is not something that the Australian Government is too worried about at this stage (see Bruniges, Lee, & Alegounarias, 2012), other researchers have noted that rates of beginning teacher attrition in Australia are much higher than reported (Kearney, 2015; Riley & Gallant, 2010).

While the research concerning Australian induction is scant and mainly deals, the same as this article does, on the experiences of the beginning teachers themselves, the research from the US has been more conclusive. Research conducted in the US has not only been able to identify the benefits of effective induction, but in doing so has validated the necessity of induction for teachers. While the various educational systems in Australia are usually more readily influenced by their British counterparts, the research originating from the US has been more comprehensive and more definitive with regard to the benefits of beginning teacher induction and its impact upon teacher retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), overcoming problems that beginning teachers face (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2001) and teacher effectiveness (Stanulis & Floden, 2009).

The call for effective induction in Australia has been prominent since at least the 1990s. In 2000, a major review of teacher education in New South Wales was undertaken for the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), in which it was noted: “Such [induction] programs must be more sophisticated than introductory familiarization programs, and may involve core packages developed cooperatively between the employers, universities and others with appropriate expertise” (Ramsey, 2000, p. 66). This was followed by a national report in 2002 specifically to “Improve the preparation and support of beginning teachers by identifying their needs, and by identifying principles and practices that are effective in assisting them to make the transition from initial training to teaching in schools” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2002, p. 9). In NSW, we see the result of these reports with the establishment of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers in 2004.

Since 2004 the NSWIT, now the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES), has done little to ensure that teachers received the comprehensive induction that they encourage. In their accreditation manual, the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (2005) states that all beginning teachers should undergo an induction process that includes mentoring and ongoing support. However, in the two cases reported here, these recommendations have culminated in minimal action, which have not, according to the data collected, produced the desired effect.

4. Methodology

The guiding research question for the broader study, which was an examination of induction programmes throughout the state of NSW, Australia was: What factors support or limit the introduction of effective induction programmes for beginning teachers? The research question was investigated through a collective case study (see Kearney, 2013). The aim of the study was to ascertain the nature of induction practices and how they supported teachers. The methods used to gather data included interviews and the collection of supporting documents.

The research process occurred across three phases: the identification of appropriate cases that had current induction programmes in place. This was undertaken through questionnaires distributed to all independent (private) schools in the state. Independent schools were chosen as they are responsible for their own induction. Government (public) schools have centrally run induction procedures that are seen as meeting the needs of those teachers, despite not meeting effective induction by international standards (see Kearney, 2013). Schools that self-identified as having a beginning teacher induction programme in place were then invited to take part in the study. Six schools were chosen for the initial part of the study and the two presented here were part of those initial six. Once initial contact was made with a member of the executive at the school, they were asked to send out a letter of invitation to the teachers in the school who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Those teachers then made contact with the researcher and interviews were scheduled.

Individual interviews were then conducted with the administrator of the induction programme and teachers who had and or were currently undertaking that programme. In the two cases presented here, three teachers in each school were interviewed. The last part of the data collection was an examination of policies relating to induction and professional development in each of the schools selected. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 min and an hour. The interviews were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of the induction experience from each teacher's point of view.

The cases presented here are summaries of the interpreted narratives (Creswell, 2007) to present teachers' experiences. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to preserve anonymity. Ethics approval was received for this study and all ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to. While original transcripts and descriptive narratives (case reports) were used, for brevity, they are not presented here. The cases reported in this article present two schools where three teachers and one administrator were interviewed, Case 1 and Case 2.

5. Results

5.1. Case 1

The school was relatively new, having opened in 2006, only a year after the NSWIT requirements came into effect. Eight years into the school's inception, evidence collected found that there were no policies with regard to induction; however, Ed, the administrator of the induction programme, reported that a team had recently been convened to write and adopt official policy documents. Recent contact with the teachers (July 2015) indicated that these documents have still not materialised.

The interview with the administrator provided insight into the school's foundation, its operation and ethos, but not as much on the specifics of the induction programme. By all accounts there is no formal or informal beginning teacher induction at the school, although in the initial selection phase the school administrator self-identified as having an ongoing induction programme. Although direct questions were asked, Ed was unwilling to provide any details with regard to how they were being met, and the particular components of induction and support provided.

Ed reported that when the induction programme was first conceptualised, it was based primarily on the recommendations of the NSWIT, but under his leadership, it was, "transformed to better fit the needs of our school community". Ed refused to elaborate on the specifics of the original

elements of the programme and how they changed to better fit the needs of the teachers. An overriding theme of the interview was pastoral care for both teachers and students at the school and how that was the priority. Ed reported that the induction programme was not only adequate to meet the needs of beginning teachers at the school, but the programme was “very successful” and that the teachers are some of the happiest he’s worked with; this sentiment is in stark contrast to what teachers revealed about their experience at the school. Specifically, he said: “we give all the teachers, especially those new to the school, all the support they need, not only to get the job done, but to become great teachers in a great school”. According to the teachers, this is not what the school provided.

None of the three teachers interviewed had anything positive to say at any point regarding a structured process of induction. Words used to describe induction were: “haphazard”, “terrible”, “disjointed”, “ridiculous”, “poor” and “poorly managed”. The teachers expressed disappointment with the administration of the programme; the level of support they received, not only in the accreditation/registration process, but also in their teaching; and, the school’s lack of familiarity about NSWIT requirements.

Not only were the teachers disappointed with their induction, but one teacher, Emma, was “extremely frustrated” by the process. When Emma found she could not get help from her school, she turned to the NSWIT, which she found equally disheartening. She reported that she spent many of her lunch breaks “on hold” with the NSWIT and found that they “weren’t very helpful”. The teachers at Case 1 found themselves in a perpetual circle of frustration, where they could not get the information they required: the school would refer them to the NSWIT for help and the NSWIT would tell them that it was the school’s responsibility to handle induction and accreditation matters. Another teacher, Elle, who was interviewed, noted:

We had to figure everything out for ourselves. They go on and on in meetings about the importance of pastoral care for our students, but when we went to them and asked for help, they had no answers. It was like this is your thing, you figure it out. It just wasn’t a high priority for them, but for us our employment depended on it.

The result of the process at Case 1 was such that once the teachers found out what was required of them, they had to educate those responsible for induction at the school about their specific responsibilities; a process that made the teachers quite uncomfortable. Another teacher, Nick, articulated this sentiment by saying that it made him feel “incompetent”. The additional impediments of beginning teachers in educating their superiors in the processes of induction and accreditation; the discomfort of having to ask senior colleagues to complete tasks such as observation reports; and, continuing to negotiate the first years of becoming a teacher, should culminate in a situation that seems dire, but this is not what the research found. All three teachers were, at the time of the research, on their way to fulfilling the requirements of accreditation and have admitted to learning a lot about teaching along the way, despite the hardships faced. The teachers were able to sort their way through the bureaucratic system of accreditation without proper induction with the help of their colleagues and their own initiatives, which seem to have made the teachers more resilient, even if some bitterness remained.

Notwithstanding the hardships faced throughout their induction process, the teachers are content to stay at the school; however, this is mostly due to the lack of other options in the regional area. They admitted that although their first year was very difficult, the school is a nice place to work and teaching staff is collaborative and supportive. Nevertheless, the adversity these teachers faced in the early years of their career is exactly what effective induction is designed to prevent. The reality is that these teachers made it through those years without too much ill effect is a testament to their professional fortitude, rather than.

5.2. Case 2

The induction process at Case 2 is perceived as an administrative procedure outside of the teaching and learning process, rather than as part of the teaching and learning cycle. At the outset of the interview, the administrator made it clear that the NSWIT requirements and the added burden of the accreditation procedures, on both the administration and the teachers at the school, have hindered the induction practices at the school. The administrator, Francis, reported a high teacher turnover rate, one they attribute to hiring highly qualified teachers from overseas who require accreditation.

The programme at the school offered little structured support outside of a two-day orientation, referred to by Francis as induction, which is mandated for all new teachers to the school. The school relies on the head of the beginning teacher's subject area to take the lead role in inducting new teachers in their respective departments, but offers no training, no extra time, no remuneration for this undertaking. The beginning teachers at Case 2 all reported receiving support, but it was solicited; the teachers had to ask for support and for the administrative procedures required by the NSWIT for accreditation to be carried out. One teacher, Famke, noted: "Not even the observations required by the NSWIT was offered; I had to ask other teachers to come and observe me and on top of that, ask them to write reports on those observations; it was really bad".

During their two-day orientation at the start of the year, the beginning teachers were given an induction pack with all the required paperwork for accreditation and were then left on their own to figure out how that process would unfold. Examination of the induction pack revealed that of the 35 items, none relate to the processes of induction or accreditation. It included such things as: general school policies, forms, reporting guidelines, a school diary and other miscellaneous administrative items that relate to a teachers day to day work. One teacher, Fran, described the pack that was received: "We were handed an induction pack that had all these papers in it about accreditation and support processes, but I never saw any of that stuff happen".

The lack of support and knowledge about induction processes is reminiscent of the attitude of the school towards the NSWIT. At the school, the absence of an effective induction programme was less about the number of teachers who needed to be inducted than it was about the divergence of opinions about the value of such a process. The NSWIT-recommended processes of induction are not adhered to because the school does not regard the process as worthwhile: it is seen as a burden to the administrative staff; the head of department (HoD) who manages the process; and, as an interference with the work of beginning teachers who should be focused on improving classroom practices. The NSWIT conceptualises the induction process as intrinsically linked to the development of the teacher and is thought to improve the teacher's capacity to develop their teaching and learning in the classroom (2005). At Case 2, these two are not linked at all; rather, the accreditation process is seen as an administrative task that takes teachers away from their priorities, which is to ensure student learning.

Despite the lack of an integrated induction programme at the school, the teachers were managing satisfactorily by finding people in their departments, or elsewhere in the school, they could rely on for professional support. For two of the teachers, this was their HoD, and for the third it was a group of teachers from his faculty. The lack of a formal support structure in the programme made it difficult to get a comprehensive picture of induction at the school. Despite each teacher having a distinctive experience, the teachers agreed that the school lacked a structured induction programme. One teacher, Diane, described the experience in this way:

It was weird. You really can't call what I experienced induction; it was more like a trial by fire. I came into the school all enthusiastic and ready to go, but within days it seemed I was left on my own. I didn't know what programs I was teaching, where I could get resources—it was really hard. I made it through those first few months by working ten to twelve hours a day. The other teachers said they would help but they had their own classes and looked just as busy as I was so I felt bad asking for help. I felt like a failure in those first few months. But making it through that was a kind of empowering experience and now I'm doing okay.

Rather than appreciating the added burden of accreditation and giving them time-release or structured support, beginning teachers are forced to negotiate the process on their own. The teacher quoted above felt “empowered” because she was able to negotiate the accreditation process on her own after months of feeling like a failure.

6. Discussion

While both of the cases presented were quite different, similarities and trends were found. In both cases, the beginning teachers were most concerned with the accreditation process and felt that induction should focus on these administrative requirements. The accreditation process referred to is part of the “new scheme”. In the scheme all new teachers receive provisional accreditation upon graduating from an accredited initial teacher education programme and must attain proficiency level within three years of full-time teaching. From that standpoint, the formal aspect of teacher evaluation and accreditation was paramount in each of these programmes, regardless of the way the programme, or lack thereof, was implemented. There were four overriding issues that seemed to affect the way that the induction was implemented: the school’s interpretation of term induction, and the manner in which induction is introduced to the beginning teacher when they are first employed; the attitude of the administrator, and by proxy the school, to the NSWIT and the accreditation process; the school’s conceptualisation of the responsibility of induction; and finally, the school’s understanding of the mentor role. These four themes broadly determined the success or failure of the programme from the teachers’ perspectives.

In both cases, the schools seemed to misunderstand or misuse the term induction to denote something else. The term induction is routinely used incorrectly in educational settings (Feiman-Nemser, 2010; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005; Martinez, 1994; Wong, 2004); therefore, it is not surprising that it has an impact on the effectiveness of the process at school level. In Case 1, induction was seen as pastoral care for teachers, which if implemented successfully, may have led to a more successful programme. A common definition for pastoral care is, “emotional support and spiritual care by helping people connect with their own inner and community resources” (Pastoral Care Council, n.d.). This could be seen as a good starting point for an induction programme, unfortunately, none of the teachers interviewed found that they were professionally, emotionally or spiritually supported by the school.

In Case 2, induction, as reported by the administrator, was a two-day process at the beginning of the year; however, it was not specific to teachers starting their careers, but instead were geared towards all new teachers to the school. This, according to the teachers, was where the formal induction programme in the school ended. Although the claim by the administrator that there was a one- to two-year induction programme, the formal structure of induction was a two-day orientation at the start of the year.

The attitudes of the administrators in both of these cases could not have been more different. In Case 1, Ed towed the line with regard to policies and procedures as outlined by the NSWIT, despite the lack of the implementation of those procedures from the teachers’ points of view. In Case 2, Francis openly spoke out against the administrative pressures imposed by the NSWIT and saw them as detrimental, not only to the teachers, but also the school. In conceptualising induction as the means by which to fulfil the administrative process of accreditation, these two schools are not supporting their teachers.

It is a clear misunderstanding of what a comprehensive induction programme should entail to believe that it is meant to fulfil the administrative requirements of accreditation or registration. Both administrators report having induction programmes, and even when presented with the definition of induction put forth by the NSWIT, both administrators thought that their programme was providing the specific supports their teachers needed in their schools, where clearly, from the teachers’ perspectives, they were not.

The last factor that affected the success of the induction process was the conceptualisation of the mentor role. The role of mentor and the ways in which mentor/mentee relationships are formed and maintained are arguably the most significant role in any induction programme (Kearney, 2014). Case 1 did not mention the provision of a mentor, but it was evident that the teachers turned to their HoD to fill the role. Case 2, specifically mentioned the provision of a mentor and appointed the beginning teacher's HoD or line manager as the mentor. The HoD was reported to be in the best position to oversee the beginning teacher in both cases; however, the interviews with the teachers revealed that the HoD did little more than what is usually expected of them, which negates the provision of a mentor as a part of the formal induction process in either case. While a HoD, in certain circumstance, may be an acceptable mentor, it should not necessarily be the norm. The beginning teachers interviewed all reported being hesitant to approach their mentor as they felt s/he was "too busy" or "time-poor", did not want to "seem incompetent" and did not think their "issue was important enough to bring their boss". In addition to the issues associated with being a mentor, there was no indication that any of the heads of department had volunteered for the role of mentor, nor that they had suitable experience to be a mentor. Neither of the programmes offered any extra time to the mentor, no remuneration and no training was provided.

7. Conclusions

A proper conceptualisation of induction that is aligned with the best practice can ensure that the spirit of induction is maintained and the needs of beginning teachers met. The needs of a neophyte entering a profession are well documented and the policies, procedures and recommendations by the accrediting body, in this case the NSWIT, now BOSTES, illustrate these needs and mandate and recommend procedures by which those needs can be met; namely a comprehensive induction programme that includes mentoring. Induction and accreditation/registration are, and need to be, two separate procedures. While accreditation may occur simultaneously with induction, if the purpose of an induction programme is simply to ease teachers through the accreditation process, it is unlikely to meet the professional and personal needs of a neophyte entering a new career for the first time.

Kearney (2014) identified nine elements that have been identified as characteristics of effective induction: the one- to two-year mandated programme that focused on teacher learning and evaluation; the provision of a mentor; the opportunity for collaboration; structured observations; reduced teaching and/or release time; intensive workplace learning; beginning teacher seminars and/or meetings; professional support and/or professional networking; and part of a programme of professional development. Case 1, as reported by the teachers, had none of those nine elements; while Case 2 included two: the provision of a mentor and the opportunity for collaboration.

The programmes presented here exemplify the sink or swim mentality that has pervaded the teaching profession for far too long and one of the phenomena in education that can be avoided through the implementation of quality induction programmes. However, as is seen in the cases presented here, schools continue to misconceptualise induction as either orientation and/or mentoring only, instead of "the primary phase in a continuum of professional development leading to the teacher's full integration into a professional community of practice and continuing professional learning throughout their career" (Kearney, 2013).

Induction practices lay the foundation for the careers of neophyte teachers. While these practices have, in recent years, been structured, formalised and mandated in New South Wales, the manifestation of the intent of those policies have not been realised in schools. Although it may be difficult to generalise to the broader community of schools in NSW, the evidence presented in this article suggests this is likely to be a common characteristic of induction, similar to what was found twelve years ago by the national government (see DEST, 2002).

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