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Making a difference: The role of initial teacher education and induction in the preparation of secondary teachers: A summary

Becoming a teacher happens across a continuum that includes the formal period of initial teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2001), and the induction phase when the newly qualified teacher is working towards full registration. There is increasing evidence that professional experiences in the early years of teaching are a crucial influence on newly qualified teachers' professional learning and formation of career intentions (OECD, 2005).

This project looked at the links between recruitment, initial teacher education (ITE) and teachers' experiences within the induction phase. In partnership with beginning teachers and their mentors, we sought to enhance understanding of teachers' reasons for choosing teaching, how their expectations mapped to the reality of their teaching experience and career intentions, and the process of becoming a teacher. We also sought to provide a robust evidence base for future teacher education policy and practice that acknowledges the transition between ITE and schools.

Research aims and questions

The project aimed to:

1. explore how a national sample of secondary teachers' experiences of ITE contributed to their sense of preparedness and efficacy as they made the transition to the classroom and continued to inform their teacher learning and practice
2. examine the effect of ITE and induction on the beginning teachers' experiences of becoming a teacher and early career path decisions
3. provide exemplars of effective induction programmes that will inform the wider community as to what works, for whom, and in what context
4. describe and explore the views of beginning teacher mentors or supervising teachers with respect to teachers' preparedness and developing capability.

Research design

The project used a mixed-method design. A questionnaire administered to secondary teacher graduates across all ITE providers in New Zealand provided baseline data on the population of graduates in 2005 ($N = 855$). From this cohort, 100 teachers (29 males, 71 females) formed in-depth case studies. Of these, 68 entered teaching from another occupation, 26 directly from study, and six from other pathways. The data were generated from interviews conducted at the mid- and end-year points of the teachers' first year of teaching and midway through the second year. With the permission of the beginning teachers, mentor teachers were also asked to complete online surveys that related to the mentoring experiences of the first- and second-year teachers.





Findings

Choosing teaching and preparation for teaching

Graduating teacher questionnaire responses ($N = 855$) indicated that the most important motivations for choosing teaching were altruistic and intrinsic in nature. Interviews at six months revealed that reasons for choosing teaching were complex and multifaceted. Change-of-career teachers, in particular, were motivated by a mix of “push” (e.g., dissatisfaction with prior occupation), and “pull” (e.g., prior teaching-related experiences, perceived personal ability, teachers in the family, job expectations, making a difference) factors. Interview responses included a higher proportion of extrinsic reasons related to salary, reliable incomes, family-friendly working conditions, and holiday entitlements, than survey responses.

The majority of graduate teachers felt well prepared to begin teaching. Positive components of ITE programmes included practicum, planning, reflective practice, preparation for assessment, and mix of theory and practice. Areas where the teachers would have liked to have seen more focus included: classroom management; curriculum focus; school organisation; and meeting students’ diverse needs, especially the needs of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and gaining knowledge and understanding of pedagogical practices related to inclusion and support of Māori.

Evaluation of the ongoing influence of ITE was mixed; some teachers reported ongoing reference to ITE resources, others saw less immediate relevance to current day-to-day concerns. Change-of-career teachers often noted that prior experiences—both in careers and relationships—influenced their approach to classroom management, relationships with students, and establishment of curriculum expertise and relevance.

Becoming a teacher

At six months, most teachers reported that teaching was as expected—demanding and hard work. The majority of teachers were teaching in their preferred subject area or areas and involved in extracurricular activities. Challenges and frustrations came in the form of managing workloads and associated work–life balance, managing the classroom, feeling overwhelmed by student effort and achievement, assessment pressures, lack of resources, and, for a significant number (30 percent), inadequate formal support structures. Rewards were primarily expressed in terms of student learning and relationships. At 12 months, 54 percent of the teachers reported that they were “satisfied” and 28 percent were “very satisfied” with their role as a teacher.

By the second year, teachers overwhelmingly reported that teaching was much “better”. “Better” was qualified in terms of less stress, more effective classroom

management, getting to know the systems, increased confidence, being better organised, being clearer about expectations of self and students, and building sound relationships with staff and students. Many noted, however, that with the extra teaching and school-wide responsibilities, the second year was still very demanding. At 18 months, satisfaction levels increased slightly, with 54 percent of the teachers reporting that they were “satisfied” and 30 percent “very satisfied” with their role as a teacher.

Teacher learning was facilitated and supported in a range of ways. Informed by evaluations of their own student learning outcomes, teachers drew on ideas from ITE and school-based and external professional development. Whilst some teachers reported positive interactions with colleagues regarding assessment design, planning, team teaching, and classroom observations, others appeared to be working in isolation. Teacher learning in the first year focused on classroom management, getting to know systems such as assessment and reporting, resource production, and building relationships with staff and students. By the end of the year, teachers’ efforts to develop more effective pedagogical practices included an increased awareness of the learner as an individual. Some teachers, however, were still coping with abusive student behaviour, lack of resources, feeling undervalued and undersupported, and feeling frustrated with not having a permanent teaching position.

In the second-year interviews teacher learning was characterised by “dissolution of the boundaries between notions of subject knowledge and the embedded, sociocultural knowledge of school students” (Yandell & Turvey, 2007, p. 548). In understanding the complexity of the learning process, teachers expressed increased awareness about the diversity of learning needs and the importance of relationships and supportive learning environments. For some, however, the balance between teacher-centred and student-centred learning environments was a source of tension. Looking to the future, most teachers viewed their development as ongoing. Target areas included developing more effective strategies for diverse learners and managing for learning and resource development, improving knowledge of things Māori, and working to reduce school-wide bullying.

Support and guidance

Despite national implementation guidelines, teachers experienced highly variable induction in aspects such as access to suitable mentors, frequency and focus of meetings for Provisionally Registered Teachers, provision of professional guidance in curriculum, assessment, and appraisal systems. The time allowance for newly qualified teachers was highly valued, providing teachers with a sense of personal space. Many teachers reported difficulties



creating a balance between day-to-day preparation and professional development within this time. Teachers sought advice on curriculum implementation, assessment, teaching strategies for specific students, behaviour management, and working effectively with parents. Many teachers noted that advice and guidance by the Specialist Classroom Teacher was beneficial.

Mentors of first-year teachers reported that they most often fulfilled the roles of observer, feedback provider, confidence builder, resource provider, and role model. Other areas of support reported less frequently included support for parent-teacher interviews and report writing, offering of professional readings, invitations to team teach, encouragement to participate in extracurricular activities, and tips for managing systems and paperwork.

The focus of induction shifted in the second year of teaching. There was a noticeable decline in formal meeting for Provisionally Registered Teachers and mentors, with mentoring arrangements moving to support on a needs basis. Only a minority of teachers reported involvement in a proactive programme with articulated goals and target areas of professional development. Most, but not all, beginning teachers appeared happy to seek help and guidance that involved ongoing conversations with a range of colleagues. Mentors also acknowledged their changing roles. In addition to that of observer, their perceived roles included relational aspects such as coach, sounding board, critical friend, and confidant.

Observations of other teachers was frequently discussed as one of the most valued professional opportunities, but one that teachers often reported not "doing" as much as they should or would like to. Reactions to appraisal of their own teaching were mixed. Although most teachers reported receiving helpful feedback, this was rarely matched with sustained follow-through action plans. Appraisals were sometimes perceived to be more about meeting registration requirements than for professional growth purposes. Uncertainty with the processes and detail of registration was expressed by many teachers. A significant number of mentors of second-year teachers reported that they (the mentors) were unfamiliar with the *Towards Full Registration: A Support Kit* (New Zealand Teachers Council & Ministry of Education, 2006).

Teachers' assessment of their induction programme remained fairly stable, 55–60 percent reporting that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" across the three interview periods. For those teachers who rated their induction experiences highly, there was clear evidence that they were involved in professional relationships with colleagues who both valued them and recognised their special needs as beginning teachers. Informal support from family, friends, and colleagues, including principals, continued to be acknowledged positively.

Career intentions

Teachers were largely happy with their decision to go teaching. Three of the teachers left teaching at the end of 2006 and a small number indicated a desire to leave teaching or move to a teaching-related career once they were registered. Whilst the majority of the cohort were happy to stay in teaching at least for the next three to five years, some were adopting a "wait and see" approach to long-term plans. Change-of-career teachers in particular were aware of alternatives to teaching and felt that teaching would provide a set of portable skills should they decide to move on.

Conclusions

Choosing teaching and preparation for teaching

Recruitment strategies need to focus not just on teachers' potential to make a social contribution.

Teachers are also likely to be attracted by campaigns that portray teaching as an intellectually challenging career that offers opportunities to strengthen existing talents alongside opportunities to develop new skills that may serve both teaching and other careers.

The study challenges the dominant discourse of preparation in ITE policy and standards (see Ord, 2007). Becoming a teacher needs to be clearly perceived as a continuum of learning and developing of professional identity.

Becoming a teacher

Teachers' expectations for the classroom, informed by practicum, appeared relatively realistic in terms of workload and challenge.

Support and guidance

Although the majority of induction programmes incorporated practices involving time allowance, allocation of mentors, meetings for Provisionally Registered Teachers, and appraisal, their nature and quality varied considerably both across and within schools.

It is of concern that some teachers, especially those in small departments, those who started part-way through the year, those in part-time positions, and those in contract positions, were "at risk" in terms of getting access to appropriate induction support and guidance.

Induction programmes (and ITE) need to be responsive to the diversity of beginning teachers' prior experiences and expertise. Teachers in the cohort who expressed dissatisfaction with their induction programme (approximately 35 percent) appeared, for the most part, unable to negotiate more satisfactory arrangements.

Few teachers reported *sustained* professional interactions with colleagues. Reliance on "on-the-run" interactions limited the potential for sustained critical dialogue and professional growth. Teachers need to be supported by "integrated professional cultures" that maintain



opportunities for professional learning beyond the first year. Opportunities for newly qualified teachers to participate in a community of practice that was wider than their department (or school) proved a valuable stimulus for reflective practice.

In those schools where induction was less than satisfactory, both teachers and mentors appeared confused about roles, accountability, and registration expectations. Beginning teachers were more likely to be concerned about being a burden on otherwise busy colleagues.

Mentors adopted different roles for working with first- and second-year teachers. However, frequently the focus of collaboration appeared to be more on resource sharing and affective support alongside “completion” of registration requirements, rather than continuous teacher development with a shared responsibility for student success.

Mentoring is a complex and important role. The move to provide mentor teachers with designated time needs to be accompanied with focused professional development regarding mentor roles and responsibilities.

Career Intentions

Beginning teachers need to feel valued. The prevalence of contract positions, with tenuous or partial discussions about the possibility of permanent roles, was a huge concern for beginning teachers, and affected their sense of identity.

Teaching as a career was perceived by many as providing a set of skills and experiences that were portable to other careers.

Limitations of the project

Collectively, the teacher and mentor responses highlight the ups and downs of the beginning teachers' journeys, showcasing the “good” and “not so good” induction practices. Findings are largely based on perceptions of

experience from a cohort of 100 teachers—a self-selected sample that was over-representative of change-of-career and female teachers. It was apparent that perceptions were mediated by teachers' prior experiences, preparedness and “fit” with school culture, alongside their individual expectations and agency as beginning teachers.

Partnerships

The project involved 855 graduating teachers, many of whom volunteered to be further involved in a series of interviews. In addition, we had input from over 50 mentoring staff. Teachers reported that the opportunity to share their experiences and reflect on their development as a teacher was a valuable process. The research team is extremely grateful for the time these teachers put aside to provide such a rich database of teachers' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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