A Framework for Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Hong Kong

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Abstract. This paper introduces a framework for providing beginning teachers with induction and mentoring support. The policy being put into practice in Hong Kong is adopted as a vehicle for facilitating beginning teachers’ first year teaching and learning in a school specific context so as to ensure their smooth transition to classroom teachers and that they can develop ‘threshold’ competencies upon completion of a one year induction period.

Keywords: induction, beginning teachers, mentoring, teacher development

1. Introduction

Beginning teachers need to be assisted to achieve and retain necessary competencies in their first year teaching. Through effective induction and mentoring support, beginning teachers could reduce their feelings of isolation, increase their confidence and self-esteem in the classroom, enhance professional growth, and improve the capacities of self reflection and problem solving (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). It could also help ease the transition to the teaching profession, thereby enhancing their efficacy as facilitators of student learning.

This article attempts to introduce a newly constructed common framework for induction and mentoring support for beginning teachers. The framework being put into practice in teacher training institutions in Hong Kong is adopted as a vehicle for facilitating beginning teachers’ first year teaching and learning in a school specific context so as to ensure their smooth transition to classroom teachers and that they can develop threshold competencies upon completion of a one year induction period. To enhance beginning teachers’ professional development towards the threshold competency level, school mentors need to complete a set of school-based pointers in order to ensure that continuing support is provided through regular feedback on mentees’ performance, identifying mentees’ strengths and areas for improvement, and providing apt guidance and assistance accordingly. There is a deep belief that the constructed induction and mentoring framework aims to empower beginning teachers rather than regulate them, and will have positive impact on teacher quality in terms of professional progression.

2. Induction and Mentoring Support for Beginning Teachers

For about 30 years, educators have discussed the need to provide systematic and substantial support to beginning teachers in order to increase retention rates. Induction can be defined as a transitional period in teacher education between preservice preparation and continuing professional development, during which assistance may be provided. Beginning teachers, especially those in their first year of teaching, often encounter a reality shock as they transfer from a relatively sheltered pre-service teacher education program to a novel situation where they have to be personally accountable for their professional work (Lee & Feng, 2007). In this regard, beginning teachers need to acquire particular professional knowledge and expertise during the induction period. Such knowledge may be derived from the perceived problems and needs of beginning teachers, including the disciplining students, motivating students, dealing with individual differences of their students, assessing student’s work, relating to parents, organizing class work, and obtaining materials and supplies (Veenman, 1984). Some scholars such as Tickle (2000) and (Lee & Feng, 2007) suggest that these types of teacher knowledge tend to center around academic subject matter, learners, classroom management, pedagogical skills, the working context of the school, curriculum, assessment, and the routines and functions of being a teacher.

2.1. The Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring is defined as the one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee’s
expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession (teaching) and into the specific local context (the school) (Hobson et al., 2008). Most formal models use experienced teachers to serve as guides nurturing those just starting careers. According to research, effective mentors also share knowledge, skills, and experiences, especially if their backgrounds involve similar specializations. A mentor relationship is characterized by openness and confidentiality. A mentor aims to be a discussion partner who can pose questions in order to support the learning and reflective process of the mentee (McGee, 2001). Mentors are experienced colleagues who are formally given responsibility for helping beginning teachers (mentees). The findings of Lee & Feng, (2007) reveal that mentors provide four forms of support: provision of information, mutual lesson observation, collaborative lesson preparation and discussion in the office. In fact, they play such roles as teacher, coach, trainer, positive role model, developer of talent, protector, opener of doors, sponsor, and successful leader (Gold, 1996). The key notion is the socialization of the mentee through the leadership and support of the more experienced professional. Day (1999) contends that mentoring is often seen as a structured personal support for learning or learner support rather than support through training. Mentors often emphasize the facilitation of the protégé’s fulfilling of their own potentials as well as the development of their self-reliance and accountability (Lee & Feng, 2007). Wang (2001) recorded substantial variations from country to country in the frequency of interactions between mentor and mentee per week (number of times) during induction. He noted that most of these interactions in China and the UK took place in an office, whilst in the US most occurred in classrooms.

2.2. Professional Development for Mentors and Mentees

Mentoring beginning teachers may have a positive impact on the professional and personal development of mentors (Hagger & Mcintyre, 2006). The benefits of mentoring relate to the provision of emotional and psychological support, which has been shown to be helpful in boosting the confidence of beginning teachers, enabling them to put difficult experiences into perspective, and increasing their morale and job satisfaction (Bullough, 2005; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). The nature of support to beginning teachers can be categorized into instructional related support and psychological support and psychological support. The former refers to supporting novices with the knowledge, skills and strategies necessary for success. Mentors can learn through self-reflection or critical reflection on their own practice (Simpson, Hastings & Hill, 2007). They have also been found to have learned from their beginning teacher mentees, from participation in mentor training courses, from university tutors and more generally, from opportunities to talk to others about teaching and learning in general or about their mentees’ or their own teaching in particular (Hagger & Mcintyre, 2006). On the other hand, factors affecting mentoring support include teaching workload, grade and subject, style of mentor-protégé interactions, relationships between mentor and mentee, incentives for the mentors, and collegial culture in the case study schools. It is notable that there are positive and negative developments perceived by the protégé and the foci of mentoring tend to be the teaching of content rather that curriculum and pedagogy (Lee & Feng, 2007) and learn from the mentee (Harrison, Lawson & Wortley, 2005).

3. Construction of Induction and Mentoring Framework

Studies reported that beginning teachers, especially those in their first year of teaching, often encounter a ‘reality shock’ as they transfer from a relatively protected pre-service teacher education program to a novel situation where they have to be personally accountable for their professional work. In phase 2, with reference to the discussion of mentoring support above as well as the recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualification (ACTEQ) in 2008, an induction and mentoring support framework agreed between teacher education institutions and the schools where beginning teachers teach has been established in order to ensure student teachers’ smooth transition to beginning teachers who can develop ‘threshold’ competencies upon completion of a one year induction period. In the era of globalization, rapid changes in society arise from complex socio-political environments. Beginning teachers are required to take up expanded roles and responsibilities relating to teaching, curriculum development, students with diverse needs, changing forms of student assessment, broad range of student activities, professional development, involving parents, and interacting with the wider community. There is a strong need for providing professional and effective induction and mentoring support for beginning teachers to ease the transition to the teaching profession.

3.1. Purposes of the Induction Program

The induction program aims at beginning teachers’ effective professional development. It is envisaged as a package of integrated program with school-based mentoring support that tackles their personal needs,
instructional needs, operational needs and professional needs. Through on-site sharing and learning with experienced teachers, support for beginning teachers can be done. This induction program lasting a year has been established with the following objectives:

- To provide comprehensive workplace experience for beginning teachers
- To provide integrated professional guidance and support to beginning teachers
- To lay a firm foundation for beginning teachers’ lifelong education
- To help beginning teachers systematically reflect on and self evaluate their own work.

Thus beginning teachers are expected to be accountable for their work. Opportunities for early professional development are essential. When their learning is supported and facilitated by mentors, they as mentees will benefit most in the workplace. Not only do they develop themselves professionally but they can exert positive influence on school improvement and school development.

As the induction program is school-based in principle, many schools are adopting different approaches to establishing an effective induction system. However, it is expected that the system in each school should be composed of the following baseline expectations:

- A system with clear objectives, concrete plans, committed human resources and effective coordination
- A system in which each beginning teacher is given individual attention
- A planned effort to provide each beginning teacher with comprehensive learning experiences
- A portfolio to document each beginning teacher’s path of development
- An evaluation system to inform the future development of schools’ induction systems.

3.2. Induction Completion Reference – Interim and Final Reviews

To provide a common framework for effective induction and mentoring support for mentees, an Induction Completion Reference (ICR) being composed of a set of school-based pointers is recommended for use as a vehicle for facilitating the beginning teacher’s first year learning in a specific context in order to ensure that the mentee can construct ‘threshold’ competencies upon completion of a one-year induction period. The ICR is constructed with reference to the Teacher Competencies Framework comprising four professional domains including:

- teaching and learning
- student development
- school development, and
- professional relationships and services.

The reference points illustrated in terms of ‘teaching and learning domain’ in the following can help facilitate beginning teachers’ self evaluation and the mentors’ provision of support and guidance to the mentees. School can make adjustments on the ICR to suit their needs. The mentors (experienced teachers) have to make reference to the school context and exercise professional judgment based on sound evidence when assessing beginning teachers’ professional performance. Figure 3 illustrate some reference points in accordance with four domains. Mentees are requested to make reflections on which mentors will provide comments during interim and final reviews.

In addition, the list in Figure 4 below sets out daily responsibilities to be met by a beginning teacher during the induction period. The quantitative evidence in relation to mentees’ responsibilities is to be validated by the mentor during interim and final reviews. The purpose is to ensure that mentee will acquire the minimum workplace and exposure to teach competently as a fresh teacher entering the profession. It is advised that each school can arrange matching job assignments for the mentees to ensure their scheme of work will adequately cover the listed tasks below throughout the first year of teaching.

4. Conclusion

In transition to becoming beginning teachers in the school context, the induction program consisting of ICR will ensure continuing support provided by the mentors and the school authority in line with the existing school-based practices. By means of regular feedback on mentees’ performance, mentors can identify at first hand mentees’ strengths and weaknesses so that apt support and guidance will be provided accordingly. Professional development opportunities and advice for beginning teachers within and outside schools can be identified and provided (Glatthorn, 1995). During the process of mentoring in the induction program, not only are the beginning teachers benefited in four dimensions: personal, instructional, operational and...
professional developments, but there are positive impacts’ on mentors’ professional development such as self-reflection on their own practice (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006; Simpson, Hastings & Hill, 2007).

There is a deep belief that the introduction of induction and mentoring framework can enhance student teachers’ professional competencies and strengthen beginning teachers’ self-confidence in the first year in the school context. There will be positive impact on teacher quality in terms of professional progression (Kent, 2004). To assess the function of the program, follow-up investigation will be initiated so that further improvement in will be made.

5. References


### Teaching and learning domain

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<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Descriptors (Has the mentee fulfilled the following?)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Command of subject matter knowledge</td>
<td>- Shows a basic command of subject matter knowledge in lesson preparation and delivery and through interaction with colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing and exchange of subject teaching practice</td>
<td>- Attends sharing and exchange sessions on specific subject areas in school when invited to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Command and application of pedagogical content knowledge</td>
<td>- Shows basic knowledge of the curriculum objectives of the subject taught, the learning targets and subject content when delivering lessons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum design and implementation</td>
<td>- Has basic understanding of the rationale, principles and structures of the relevant guides</td>
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| Knowledge and application of teaching strategies and skills | - Is able to use a limited range of teaching strategies and skills in delivering lessons to students  
- Instructions and explanations are mainly clear. |
| Language proficiency                               | - Displays an acceptable command of language appropriate to the subject and levels taught.                             |
| Students assessment methods and procedures        | - Makes generally appropriate use of established assessment methods and procedures.                                    |
| Use of student assessment results                 | - Is generally aware that assessment results measure effectiveness of learning and teaching                             |

**Fig. 1. Illustrations of Induction Completion Reference for four domains**

#### Evidence

1. Has taught at least a total of 210 hours.
2. Has taught at least 140 hours in the major subject.
3. Has observed at least 2 lessons in the major subject taught by peers/mentors.
4. Has taught at least 2 lessons in the major subject that have been observed by other colleagues/mentor, with pre and post observation discussions being conducted.
5. Has conducted at least 4 overall reflection exercises on the effectiveness of learning and teaching.
6. Has met requirements of Basic Information Technology.
7. Has invited mentor or some peers to observe at least one of the lessons using multi-media teaching strategies.
8. With mentor’s support and sharing, has followed through in depth at least 1 case study with self-reflection on student development.
9. Has been involved in at least one extra-curricular activity.

**Fig. 2. List of daily responsibilities in the induction program**