

Joys and Challenges of Entry-Level Teachers

There is a lot of documentation concerning the typical experiences of entry-level teachers.

beginning teachers are less confident, qualified, and competent than teachers who graduated from teacher education programs in earlier years (Gardner, 1983). Others have reported that new teachers often experienced difficulty with classroom management or discipline, student motivation, room and lesson organization, locating adequate teaching materials, understanding complex school systems and policies, and meeting the needs of individual students (Griffen, 1985; Odell, 1986; Veenman, 1984). Veenman (1984) further identified that relationships with parents of students, relationships with colleagues, insufficient time for preparation due to heavy teaching loads, and effective use of alternate teaching methods were also high ranking problematic experiences. Ganser (1999) reported that lack of spare time, burden of clerical work, and heavy teaching loads were additional critical concerns of beginning teachers. These early findings informed the formation of early teacher induction programs which were designed to address the needs of the beginning teachers.

Reports of the apparent benefits of high-quality teacher induction programs led to the development of numerous induction programs across the United States (Sweeny, 2000). The percentage of beginning full-time public school teachers who had participated in a formal induction program during their first year of teaching increased from 59% in 1993-94 to 65% in 1998, and has continued to increase since. The report also indicated that 22% of the formal induction programs were 8 months or less; 66% were 9 months to one year, and 12% were more than one year (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

What, then, have we learned about the outcomes from induction programs? While teacher induction programs were initially implemented to assist in socialization into the profession and improvement of the quality of teaching, enrollment in teacher induction programs was linked to an increase in self-confidence and classroom management (Conner, 1984), lesson planning and discipline (Eisner, 1984). Teaching behaviors such as voice inflection, eye contact, and review techniques (Huling-Austin and Murphy, 1987) are reported to, likewise improve. Other researchers (Henry, 1988; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1986) reported that teachers involved in induction programs appeared to have more positive attitudes toward teaching and plan to continue in the profession longer than non-participants. Darling-Hammond (2000) suggested students are the direct beneficiaries of highly skilled and satisfied teachers as reflected higher levels of student achievement on standardized assessments.

Agricultural education researchers, likewise, conducted studies designed to identify some of the needs, concerns, and experiences of beginning career and technical education teachers. Mundt (1991) found that the most notable CTE teacher problems and concerns were: conditions of the physical facilities; classroom management issues; organizational issues; managing the FFA component; need for more supervision and help from the principal; and determining curriculum scope, sequence, and pace. Also revealed in the findings of the Mundt investigation

were data suggesting beginning teachers were quiet, frustrated, isolated, afraid, angry, confused, and generally lacked confidence.

In a case studies of three beginning agricultural education teachers, Talbert, Camp, and Heath-Camp (1994) found the primary teacher concerns included much needed skills and understandings for effective classroom management, advising the FFA chapter, preparing for multiple classes, managing the laboratory, ordering supplies, time management, and lesson planning.

Combined with direct investigations of the needs of entry-level teacher were investigations for the professional competencies merited inservice education for a group of 37 agricultural education teachers. A closer look at the findings revealed that two of the competencies were in program administration, five in instruction, and five in the category of program planning, development, and evaluation (Shippy, 1981). Identifying strategies for motivating students was the second area in most need of inservice education for the beginning teachers. Technical skills were not viewed as the most important topics for inservice education for this cohort of beginning teachers.

Nichols and Mundt (1996) completed a nationwide study that was designed to determine which of 70 competencies within eleven broad competency areas of teaching were considered most critical for the survival of beginning agricultural education and family and consumer science teachers. They found that beginning teachers, teacher educators, building principals of the beginning teachers, and agricultural education and family and consumer science state supervisors ranked classroom management and safety competencies first and second in importance, respectively.

Mullennex (1996) examined the differences in induction practices between beginning and experienced business education teachers. Though not all schools had induction programs, findings from beginning business education teachers revealed the five most helpful induction practices were, in order: peer support group for beginning teachers, handbooks for beginning teachers, release time above the normal planning period, specialized program orientation, and classroom observation of other teachers. Mullennex reported the goals of teacher induction programs believed to be most important by beginning teachers were, in order, teacher retention, socialization, assessment and evaluation, and personal and professional development.

Kirby and LeBude and (1998) investigated the nature of concerns and effective induction practices of a group of 84 North Carolina teachers with five or less years of experience. Using findings from the researcher-designed Concerns Questionnaire, they found the teachers were moderately concerned about measures related to self, task, and impact (Fuller, 1969). Kirby and LeBude concluded that teachers entering teaching from alternative licensure routes had greater concerns than those entering through traditional teacher education programs. The initial five retention strategies of major importance found to have the greatest impact were: adequate supply of materials, textbooks and workbooks; adequate facilities; provisions for reimbursement for continuing education exist; a positive work environment; and effective student discipline policies that were endorsed and upheld by school administrators.

Mundt and Connors (1999) investigated the concerns of the state winners of the National Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association's Outstanding Young Member Award. The primary concerns of the young members were: managing the overall activities of the local FFA chapter; building support within the school system; balancing professional and personal responsibilities; recruiting and motivating students in agricultural education; using proper classroom management strategies; time management; organizing and managing safe and attractive facilities; and building support from parents, organizations and adult groups within the community.

Edwards and Briers (2000) divided a list of 163 teaching competencies for beginning Texas agricultural education teachers. After combining the individual teacher scores regarding their views of the levels of importance of the competencies and their personal competence, Edwards and Briers concluded inservice education should be offered to assist entry-phase teachers in the areas of facilitating change in curriculum and technologies, facilitating balance in personal and professional roles, facilitating public image, and facilitating student leadership growth.

In an study of the assistance provided by school district personnel of beginning Minnesota agricultural education teachers, Joerger and Boettcher (2000) concluded that the forms of assistance that had the highest perceived impact on the beginning agricultural education teachers included parental support, availability of materials and textbooks, planning time, curriculum guides for the program, and feedback from the principal. An additional planning period each day would have also made a major impact on the initial teachers. They also concluded that events related to student management, student respect, self-confidence, personal satisfaction, student success, support from the principal, and workload were perceived by beginning teachers to have a major impact on their initial teaching experience.

The following table produced by Whittington (200X) summarized the professional tasks or in-service needs of early-career teachers

Professional Task or Need	Researchers
Receiving support from the principal, mentor, parents, and community	Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Mundt, 1991; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Nesbitt & Mundt, 1993; Talbert, Camp & Heath-Camp, 1994
Receiving positive feedback from students, parents, principal, and colleagues	Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Mundt, 1991; Nesbitt & Mundt, 1993; Talbert et al., 1994
Managing the classroom and laboratory, and disciplining students	Joerger & Boettcher, 2002; Mundt, 1991; Mundt & Connors, 1999; 1994; Nesbitt & Mundt, 1993; Talbert et al., 1994
Recruiting, motivating, and retaining students	Garton & Chung, 1996; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Washburn et al., 2001
Balancing personal and professional demands through time management and organizational skills	Edwards & Briers, 1999; Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Mundt, 1991; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Talbert et al., 1994

Completing reports, applications, and requisitions	Edwards & Briers, 1999; Garton & Chung, 1996; Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Layfield & Dobbins, 2000; Talbert et al., 1994; Washburn et al., 2001
Managing and advising FFA activities	Edwards & Briers, 1999; Garton & Chung, 1996; Layfield & Dobbins, 2000; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Talbert et al., 1994
Supervising and organizing SAE programs	Garton and Chung, 1996; Layfield and Dobbins, 2000; Washburn et al., 2001
Relating to the public through an advisory committee, adult education, and communication	Edwards & Briers, 1999; Garton & Chung, 1996; Layfield & Dobbins, 2000; Talbert et al., 1994; Washburn et al., 2001
Planning lessons and developing curriculum	Joerger & Boettcher, 2000; Mundt, 1991; Talbert et al., 1994; Washburn et al., 2001
Integrating science and technology into curriculum	(Edwards & Briers, 1999; Garton & Chung, 1996; Washburn et al., 2001