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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### A MODEL TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMME AND TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF THE SUPPORT STRUCTURES

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#### ABSTRACT

Continuing the professional growth of novices so that they become effective teachers has been a challenge for decades. Research suggests that induction programmes with comprehensive support structures can achieve this outcome. The NEC Teacher Induction Programme, the focus of this article, contains such support structures. Findings from a survey of novices' perceptions of the support structures indicate that the novices view mentorship, master teacher demonstrations and the teacher-support group as the most beneficial in their induction experience.

#### INTRODUCTION

Both the most devout head teacher and the most adamant advocate for novice teacher development would concede that many novice teachers approach the job with enthusiasm. Both educators would say that with such willingness and a supportive environment, these teachers are likely to make good progress as beginning teachers. Not all however, would agree on the type of support, neither would they agree on how best to structure support for novices. Should support for novice teachers be unplanned and unstructured, left for the novice to seek out, or should it be provided through a planned teacher induction programme? It is increasingly acknowledged that induction programmes are essential, for even a very comprehensive teacher education programme cannot prepare teachers for their job completely (Britton, Paine, Pimm, and Raizen, 2003). Effective induction and mentoring of new teachers is a critical component of early teacher development and thus in the development of quality teachers (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). Yet, there is less agreement about how to effectively induct and mentor beginning teachers to fill classrooms with high-quality, accomplished teachers (Langdon, Alexander, Dinsmore, and Ryde, 2012). A well planned induction programme considers all of the needs of the beginning teacher as the teacher is trained, guided, supported, and encouraged during the delicate days of the first year (Dyal and Sewell, 2002).

Induction programmes should be well-planned, systematic, and organized for success, because at no other time in a professional's career does a teacher need more consideration, guidance, and understanding (Castetter and Young, 2000). Considering the compelling evidence supporting the value of teacher induction, every education system should have an induction programme for novice teachers. In the following portions of this article is a description of the support structures of an induction programme for novice teachers as well as findings from a survey of novices' perceptions of the support structures.

#### Support Structures of the Programme

The NEC Teacher Induction Programme, as the programme was named, evolved out of the author's quest for positive ways to support and encourage novice early childhood teachers in Guyana, as they transition from student-teachers to teachers of students. The primary goal of this one-year induction programme was to improve the teaching performance of the novices through the provision of six support structures namely; Mentorship, Career Entry and Development Profile, Master Teacher Demonstrations, Teacher-support Group, Collaborative Action Research and Early Childhood Support Courses. To develop the model, the author reviewed literature, including research on induction programmes and professional development of novice teachers, and discovered that several dimensions of teacher support have been distinguished as significant ingredients for effective teacher induction programmes. The design of the model was however guided by the conceptual framework of Eisenschmidt, (2006).

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This framework consists of professional, social and personal dimensions of teacher support and was considered appropriate as the dimensions are representative of the skills and competencies that the author envisages to be important to novice teacher development. Additionally, the author believed that the dimensions focus on the diverse range of novice teacher' needs and are equally valuable to novice teacher development. According to Eisenschmidt, the professional dimension emphasises supporting the novice teacher in gaining more confidence in the use of essential teacher competences, including pedagogical knowledge and skills. Eisenschmidt stated that the key requirements of this dimension include access to knowledge through exchange between novice and experienced teachers, further courses and consultations. In the NEC Teacher Induction Programme, the professional dimension is reflected through the Master Teacher Demonstrations and Early Childhood Support Courses.

Induction Programme the personal dimension is reflected through Mentorship and a Career Entry and Development Profile. Figure 1 details the activities of the various support structures.

### Survey, Participants, Data Collection and Analysis

A brief survey - questionnaire was developed, the objective of which was to ascertain novices' satisfaction with the support structures of the programme. The instrument consisted of closed-ended questions with response choices soliciting novices perceptions of the support structures. It was administered by the researcher at the end of the induction year. The participants were the 35 novice early childhood teachers who had directly interacted with the support structures through their participation in the NEC Teacher Induction Programme. The data collected was analysed logico-inductively. This is a thought process that uses logic to make sense of qualitative data (Mertler and Charles, 2005).

**Figure 1. Activities of the Support Structures**

SUPPORT STRUCTURES	ACTIVITIES
1. Mentorship	* Mentor conducts school and community level orientation, maintains daily on-site contact with novices, advises novices on classroom management and display strategies, engages novices in professional dialogue and shared professional development sessions, guides novices in daily lesson planning, models effective instructional strategies, observes novices use of strategy plans and gives constructive feedback, coaches novices in areas of identified need, arranges master teacher demonstrations for novices to observe, guides novices to generate ideas for improving planning and implementation strategies, facilitates effective communication between novices and parents/senior staff/colleagues, supports novices in the completion of the Career Entry and Development Profile and the Induction Evidence Portfolio, conducts professional review meetings with novices, completes record of professional review meeting forms and offers novices emotional support and encouragement.
2. Career Entry and Development Profile	Transition Point 1 * Novices complete an entry profile, identify their priorities for development and under the mentor's supervision, set professional development objectives and develop an action plan for achieving the objectives. Transition Point 2 * Novices review their professional development over the induction period, record their achievements and continuing professional development needs for the next year of teaching.
3. Master teacher demonstrations	* Master teacher demonstrates lessons and models specific teaching strategies for novices, facilitates reflective discussions on the experience, shares written plans for demonstrated lessons with novices, acts as a consultant and offers professional advice at novices' request. * Novices reflect on the experience and complete a reflective learning log.
4. Teacher support group	* Group members (novices, mentor, master teacher, all teachers in the same grade level as the novices) engage in joint lesson preparation and planning, and offer each other emotional and practical support. * Group members meet to study, analyse and discuss the regional Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, agree on strategies for achieving same, and develop strategy plans.
5. Collaborative Action Research	* Group members (same as above) identify an existing issue/problem, research and select strategies and resources for addressing the issue/problem, develop a plan of action for addressing the issue/problem, implement the plan of action in their respective classrooms, analyse outcomes, and if necessary identify alternative strategies or modifications for future actions. * Novices evidence their learning and skills development through the completion of reflective learning logs.
6. Early Childhood support courses	* Novices select courses, read course materials and complete learning activities related to same.

With the social dimension, Eisenschmidt posited that emphasis is on supporting the novice teacher to become a member of the learning community of the school, and helping the novice to understand and accept the qualities, norms, manners and organisational structure that exist within the given school. Eisenschmidt identified collaborative work, team work and project group as the key requirements of the social dimension. The support structures that reflect this dimension in the NEC Teacher Induction Programme are the Teacher-Support Group and Collaborative Action Research. Eisenschmidt explained that the personal dimension covers the process of development of a professional identity as a teacher. A safe, non-judgemental environment, team teaching and co-teaching were identified as key requirements of this dimension. In the NEC Teacher

First, the data was read through by question, preset themes were identified and scrutinized to discover patterns. Abbreviated letter codes were inserted to highlight patterns among the data. Next, the data for each question was categorised according to pattern, information pertaining to patterns was summarised and conclusions induced. Finally, conclusions were presented using frequencies, percent and narratives to describe novices perceptions of the support structures.

### Findings

As depicted on Table 1, across the group, three structures stood out from the analysed data; mentorship, master teacher demonstrations and the teacher-support group.

The majority (80 %) of the novices viewed each of the three structures as being very beneficial to their induction experience. Moreover, from the comments received, the role of these three structures seemed critical and indispensable to the perceived success of the novices. Novices praised the structures effusively.

**Table 1. Novices perceptions of the support structures**

Support Structures	Not at all Beneficial (n=35)		Somewhat beneficial (n=35)		Very beneficial (n=35)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1. Mentorship	0	0	7	20	28	80
2. Career Entry and Development Profile	12	34	23	66	0	0
3. Master Teacher Demonstrations	0	0	7	20	28	80
4. Teacher-support group	0	0	7	20	28	80
5. Collaborative Action Research	33	94	2	6	0	0
6. Early Childhood Support Courses	5	14	30	86	0	0

“My mentor was very supportive and available at all times” one novice wrote. Another explained that the master teacher demonstrations she observed were very informative and helped her improve her own methods of delivery. Additionally, some novices indicated that the teacher-support group provided a safe place for them to collaborate on lesson planning. It should be noted, that these findings add credence to the work of several researchers. While Smith and Ingersoll (2004), found that mentorship was an essential component of a comprehensive induction programme, Dyal and Sewell, (2002), asserted that opportunity to observe and reflect on model lessons conducted by master teachers is one of the key principles that should guide effective teacher induction. In keeping with the activities of the teacher-support group, the Alliance for Excellent Education, (2004), posited that one of the supports that constitutes a comprehensive induction programme is common planning time for collaborative conversations on substantive content and pedagogical issues. Overall, it was clear that the novices viewed mentorship, master teacher demonstrations and the teacher-support group as valuable to the NEC Teacher Induction Programme. However, the situation was not the same with the other support structures. Many of the novices didn’t seem happy with the Collaborative Action Research Cycle. Findings displayed on Table 1 reveal that 94 % of them viewed this support structure as not at all beneficial to their induction experience. Some novices highlighted that the structure was too demanding and added to their already busy schedule as classroom teachers. Others attributed their rating to one of two reasons, either the support structure was not given enough attention at their school or they were never able to complete a cycle. The Career Entry and Development Profile and Early Childhood Support Courses also attracted negative comments from the novices. A large number of them didn’t seem to have benefited much from the two structures thus they viewed them as somewhat beneficial. While 66 % of the novices expressed this view about the Career Entry and Development Profile, it was 86 % for the Early Childhood Support Courses. The dominant comment was that the structures involved too much record keeping and were too time consuming.

Some novices cited that they were not willing to participate in the courses since the idea reminded them of their formal teacher training experiences. Others disclosed that they had difficulty keeping up with course activities and before long, decided not to follow through with the courses. Consequently,

it would be safe to conclude that of the six support structures, the novices viewed the Career Entry and Development Profile, Collaborative Action Research and the Classroom Support Courses as the least beneficial to their induction experience.

This does not mean that such support structures were not necessary, in fact, there is evidence in the literature to substantiate their value in comprehensive teacher induction programmes. On the issue of Collaborative Action Research, Britton *et al.* (2003) asserted that in comprehensive induction programmes the practice of reflecting, inquiring, researching by oneself and with others enhances the teaching practice of novices, provides opportunities for them to actively construct knowledge within learning communities and to relate their experiences to other sources of information. Moreover, both the Career Entry and Development Profile and the Classroom Support Courses required novices to engage in reflecting and recording activities, and Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) posited that such activities encourage novice teacher’ renewal and growth. The authors cautioned that novice teachers should reflect critically and suggested that to promote critical reflection novices must be encouraged to write in journals and record their day-to-day experiences. It is obvious then that, although the novices did not view them as very beneficial, the Career Entry and Development Profile, Collaborative Action Research and Classroom Support Courses are all vital support structures for novice teacher development.

### Conclusion

Quality teachers are instrumental to the success of education; therefore, induction programmes that meet the needs of beginning teachers are essential components for schools to improve teacher retention and effectiveness (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004). Induction should include “a network of supports, people, and processes that are all focused on assuring that novices become effective in their work (Fulton, Yoon, and Lee, 2005). This article presented findings from a study that was intended to uncover novices perceptions of the support structures of a comprehensive teacher induction programme. Although the novices under study did not view all the support structures as very beneficial, the value of each was justified by the work of several renowned authors. Toward this end, I encourage educators who are truly interested in novice teacher development, to experiment with and adapt the NEC Teacher Induction Programme in their schools. This programme can act as a model for enhancing the well-being and professional development of novice teachers. Its support structures can definitely help novices cope with the realities of the classroom and the demands of their new job.

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