

Teacher Induction: A Lifeline for Novice Teachers

by Paula Jorde Bloom

If you started your early childhood career as a classroom teacher, you know from your own experience that the demands during the first year of teaching are daunting. Most novice teachers struggle with classroom management issues, lesson planning, and how to support children with special needs. Many are overwhelmed by the recordkeeping and paperwork required for child assessment, accreditation, and other aspects of program accountability.

The hard truth is that very few novice teachers step into jobs where they receive the kind of emotional and technical support they need to successfully navigate the challenges of their first year. The more common scenario revolves around stories of disillusionment and dashed expectations. It's not uncommon to hear teachers reflecting on their first year of teaching using colorful language like 'reality shock,' 'sink-or-swim,' or 'trial by fire.' The attrition rate in the first few years is staggering, prompting some to call education "the profession that eats its young."



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Performance: Competence, Commitment, and Collaboration (New Horizons, 2013), co-authored with her colleagues Ann Hentschel and Jill Bella. You may contact Paula: paula.bloom@nl.edu

It doesn't need to be this way. Other fields recognize the needs of new recruits and have implemented professional pathways that support the beginner. In early childhood education it is even more important that we address this issue, because so many new teachers have limited specialized training in early childhood.

Teacher induction programs may hold the answer to developing promising and committed teachers. Induction programs recognize that the beginning teacher is not a finished product — even one that has completed a teacher certification program. All first-year teachers take more time to do what experienced veterans consider routine teaching activities. And virtually all novice teachers experience moments of self-doubt and a sense of being overwhelmed by the physical and emotional demands of the job.

Beginning Teachers Deserve Our Focused Support

Not all novice teachers are the same. Some enter teaching in their early 20s, fresh from a two- or four-year degree program. For them, their first 'real' job coincides with the life transition events of young adulthood — living independently, buying a car, using a credit card for the first time. On the outside they may be brimming with enthusiasm and excited

about making a difference in the lives of children; on the inside they may be terrified at leaving the supportive cocoon of a college environment and good friends. Young females, in particular, often worry they won't have credibility with the parents of their students because they don't have children of their own.

Other beginning teachers are older and more mature. They may have extensive work experience, a degree in a related field, and perhaps children of their own. These older novices typically assume their new roles with more realistic expectations, but that doesn't mean they feel any more confident on the inside. In fact, older adults often harbor deep insecurities because they believe others expect them to be able to slide into their new roles with ease. Consequently, many are reluctant to ask for help for fear of looking inept.

Whether novice teachers are young or older adults, their first year of teaching provides an important opportunity for shaping their sense of identity and commitment to the field. During the first year, new teachers are more receptive to guidance and feedback than at any other point in their careers. The first year is so critical because it sets the tone and expectations for reflective practice, for ongoing professional development, and for collaborating with colleagues.

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A well-designed teacher induction program . . .

- provides a thorough orientation to the policies, practices, and expectations of the center.
- validates the knowledge, skills, and life experience the novice teacher brings to the situation.
- provides new opportunities for skill building in incremental, doable doses.
- includes regular classroom observations of the teachers' teaching and the children's learning, coupled with meaningful feedback.
- helps novice teachers develop a personal style that reflects their values, hopes, and aspirations in working with young children.
- provides the emotional support needed to navigate the ups and downs characteristic of the first year in a classroom.
- socializes the novice teacher into the life and culture of the center.
- cultivates the disposition for reflective practice and lifelong learning.

Teacher Induction Should Be More Than Staff Orientation

While all new employees need a systematic orientation to a program's policies and practices, and socialization into the program's culture, novice teachers need much more. They need regularly scheduled opportunities to meet with you, their supervisor, or an assigned mentor during their first year to reflect on practice, receive focused feedback, and chart incremental steps for skill building.

The following plan is designed to take place over 12 months and includes three phases. The first phase, during a new teacher's first month of employment, focuses on making connections and building rapport. The second phase, learning the ropes, takes place over the next five months. This phase socializes the teacher into the culture of the center and includes an overview of all components of the

teacher's job, including curriculum, assessment, and family relations. The final phase, skill building, covers the second half of the year. It focuses on deepening the teacher's understanding of best practice and reinforces norms of job-embedded professional development.

Just how you configure the induction experience for your novice teachers depends on each new teacher's level of knowledge and skill, the requirements of the specific position, and your center's supervisory structure. In small programs, the bulk of the work may fall on your shoulders. If you have a large program with an assistant director, education coordinator, or veteran teachers who supervise new staff, then your teacher induction program will include a larger team of people.

Phase 1: Making Connections and Building Rapport

The first phase of induction covers the first month of the beginning teacher's employment contract and has two goals. The first goal is to ensure that the teacher becomes acquainted with the essential requirements and expectations of the position and completes the necessary human resources paperwork required of all new employees. The second goal is for the teacher to begin building rapport with an assigned supervisor and any other individuals who will be part of the year-long induction process.

How we greet and welcome new teachers sets the stage for a mutually respectful work relationship. This can begin before they officially report for work — a welcoming e-mail or letter sent to their home, along with a picture of their new colleagues and some helpful resources for their new job. A card, banner, or small bouquet on their first day also reinforces the message that your center is a special work environment. A novice teacher's first few days will include the same activities that all new employees receive:



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIGUEL ARROYO

- A tour of the facility, including restrooms, staff lounge, and storage for personal belongings.
- Conversations with human resources staff and completion of paperwork related to payroll, insurance, retirement or other benefits, and leave policies.
- Personal introductions to each staff member.
- Introduction to essential job requirements, like first aid and rescue breathing requirements; and health and safety requirements, like TB testing, annual physicals, location of fire extinguishers, and operating entry systems.
- Review of the center's mission and vision, educational philosophy, and values statements.
- Review of work schedules, lunch and break policies, professional dress, and other personnel policies and procedures.
- Creation of a bio for the center's newsletter and display outside the new teacher's classroom as an introduction to families.

It is ideal to adjust your staffing so you don't count first-year teachers in your required ratios for the first month. Structure this time to help them get acquainted with their colleagues, gain a clear understanding of their job responsibilities, and see where they fit into the larger picture.

Allowing time during the first month on the job for lengthy observations in each classroom will help novice teachers form new connections, see your center's educational philosophy in action, and learn how each colleague can serve as a resource in the years ahead. This is the time to encourage beginning teachers to ask lots of questions.

From a supervisory standpoint, the first month should be devoted to rapport building and assessing the needs of the new teacher. Establishing open, honest, and authentic relationships is not something that can be rushed. This is the opportunity for you to build on the information you learned about the teachers during their job interview.

By the end of Phase 1, new teachers should have a clear understanding of their job responsibilities, as well as the most important skills and dispositions that define exemplary teaching. They should have a general understanding of the center's core values, expectations for their professional development, and how they will be evaluated during their first year.

Phase 2: Learning the Ropes

The focus over the next five months, the second phase of induction, is on helping beginning teachers learn the ropes so they can function independently or as part of a

teaching team in the classroom. It is also the time for you to share more detailed information about the center: its history, funders, board of directors, short- and long-term goals, curriculum, policies, traditions and rituals, and accreditation.

The goal of Phase 2 is to help the beginning teacher put into practice the educational priorities that shape decision making at your center. The transition from learning information to using it thoughtfully and intentionally is an important step in competence building. When this transition is successful, new teachers understand not only your program's educational philosophy and how it is implemented, but also how that information informs their classroom teaching practices. Making this transition is not easy, so your role as supervisor is crucial.

Plan on spending two hours each week to work with a beginning teacher during Phase 2. This includes time for daily observations of practice, one-on-one meetings to go over the teacher's documentation of student learning, a review of assessment data, and discussions about articles, videos, or other resources you've identified as potentially helpful. The challenge during this phase is to structure new learning so it is not overwhelming, but rather given in small, doable doses. Here are some additional things to cover:

- Review hand-washing procedures, norms for greeting children and families, classroom setup, lunch and naptime routines, and use of communication logs.
- Review the center's approach to child guidance, child assessment, and parent relationships.
- Review professional ethics, risk management procedures, and mandated reporting requirements.
- Review the center's annual calendar to understand the yearly schedule, holidays, how curriculum varies over the year, and seasonal special events planned by the center.

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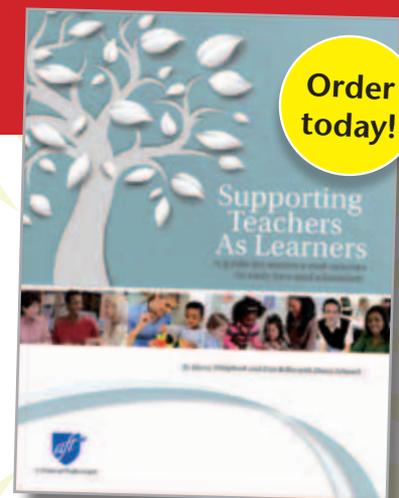
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Certainly an important goal for this phase of the induction process is to encourage the first-year teacher to become self-reflective through strategically considered questions. It is through self-reflection that new teachers begin to see themselves as competent professionals capable of making appropriate choices relating to curriculum and instruction.

A word about conducting classroom observations: most new teachers are incredibly nervous about having their supervisor observe them in action. How you approach this process will make the difference in whether your beginning teacher is an eager learner welcoming your fresh perspective or an intimidated subject reluctant to seek help and refine practice. To reduce anxiety, focus your observations and follow-up conversations primarily on what the children are learning and experiencing, rather than what the teacher is doing or not doing.

Conduct informal observations at first, even soliciting teachers' suggestions for what they would like you to focus on. You can focus observations on a single child, social interactions among children, classroom transitions, or interactions between the teacher and a child. The key is to try to observe daily for even a brief 10 to 15 minutes so you get a feel for the rhythm of the classroom.

If your observations are frequent, it won't take long before the teacher develops a comfort level with your presence in the classroom. Until the teacher's confidence is solid, hold off on using any formal classroom observation tools like the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), the Classroom Learning Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), or the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation

(ELLCO). These tools will be more appropriate in Phase 3 of the induction process.

Videotaping is another valuable tool for refining practice, but here again let the teachers take the lead. Arrange for videotaping, but initially let teachers view the videos independently and then share their observations and reflections when they are ready.

Phase 3: Skill Building

The third phase of induction identifies which job areas should be targeted for focused attention during the second half of the year to help the beginning teacher function more optimally. This is where using formal classroom observation assessments such as the ECERS-R, CLASS, or ELLCO might provide useful data to highlight teachers' areas of strength, as well as identify areas to bolster greater intentionality in classroom practices.

At this stage in the induction process teachers should be ready to move into a collaborative relationship in which they are active partners in identifying areas to strengthen, as well as different modes for learning that accommodate their learning style and work schedule. The approach needs to be individualized because each first-year teacher's journey in competence building will be different.

For some, viewing DVDs, completing self-paced modules, and reading books or Internet-based resources on specific topics will be appropriate. For others, scheduling time for focused observation of a teacher in another classroom might be in order. In general, it is best to keep these skill-building activities close to home. Time spent attending workshops or professional conferences off-site can wait until after the first year.

This is also an important time to help the teacher learn how to collect, understand,

and use formative assessment and evaluation data to make decisions about individual children and about classroom practices in general. Because early learning standards reflect visions of good teaching, they should also be used to structure conversations about children's learning.

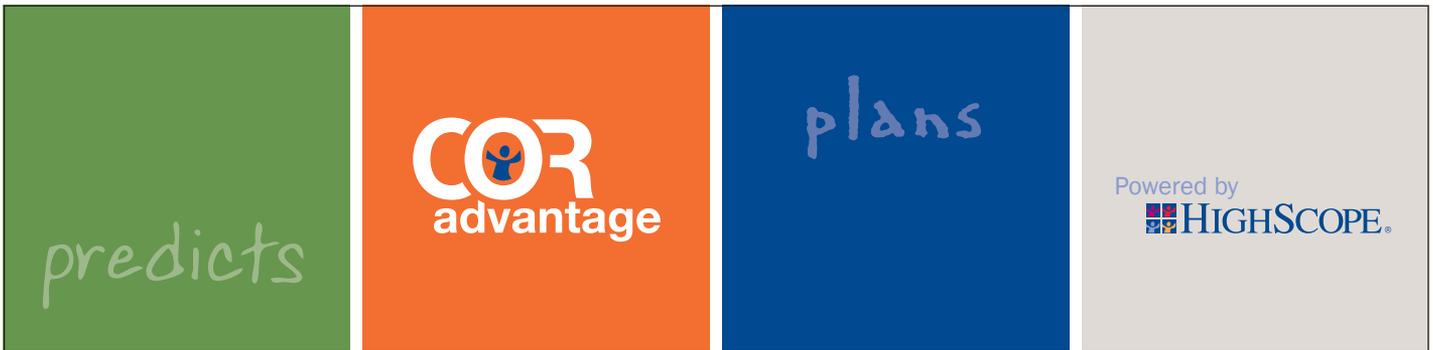
The challenge from a supervisory standpoint is to keep the skill-building goals achievable so the teacher continues to experience incremental success. This is not the time to neglect the one-on-one weekly meetings that will continue to support reflective practice. Use a dedicated hour each week to help teachers deepen their understanding of individual children in their group and strategic ways to use assessment data to scaffold children's learning to the next level of development.

As you wrap up your year-long beginning teacher induction program, be sure to schedule time for the novice teacher to provide you with feedback about your supervisory relationship. Pose questions like: "What strategies have I used this year that helped you become a better teacher?"; "What strategies have I used that were not particularly helpful to you?"; and "What other ways can I help you?" Such questions not only deepen your understanding about how you can better support this teacher in the future, they also demonstrate your willingness to receive feedback and strengthen your own professional practice.

A Win-Win Proposition

A well-designed teacher induction program can help novice teachers do more than just survive their first year on the job. It also can help them thrive in their new role, experiencing the success that lays the foundation for a long-term career in early childhood education.

Novice teacher induction programs are really a win-win proposition. Beginning



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teachers get the support and guidance they need, and experienced staff get the recognition they deserve. In the process, both the novice teacher and the supervisor are compelled to reflect on their own practices and examine their actions and beliefs about teaching and learning.

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