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EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND MENTOR-TEACHER PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED STATES

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A steady increase in the number of school age children many of them from disadvantaged backgrounds coupled with a decline in the number of new teacher graduates and considerable loss from the teaching profession will pose major problems through the 1990s for education in the United States Many of the educational reforms which have been initiated by the states in recent years are intended to address these changing conditions and perceived problems Among the more promising reforms in terms of attracting and retaining teachers are mentor teacher programmes These programmes which have been instituted in many states offer the opportunity to increase the professional status of teachers to differentiate teaching staff to reward outstanding teachers to assist beginning teachers and to improve teaching performance and student learning

Times of crises can also be times of opportunity, people often become receptive to change when a crisis situation exists and the need for change is clearly indicated It is clear that one of the fundamental changes that will need to be made in the United States during the remainder of this century, if current problems are to be addressed and future needs met, relates to the induction of new teachers

According to the United States constitution, education is a responsibility of the states rather than of the national government Even though there are many aspects of education which are common across the states, the decentralization of authority encourages the development of different approaches to common problems

The publication in 1983 of *A nation at risk*, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (15), and of dozens of subsequent reports from various national-level commissions and task forces, focused attention on problems in education throughout the country As a result, educational reforms have been initiated in each of the states

Central to any meaningful educational reform is improvement in the quality of teaching and in learning outcomes Learning should be the fundamental purpose of schools, although that purpose becomes obscured at times by other necessary, and perhaps at times some unnecessary, functions of the school and by the need to satisfy the demands of various groups and interests, both within and outside the school community The notion that educational reform was needed in the United States did not, after all, spring from concerns over interscholastic sports, the social conditions of school life, or the delivery of ancillary school services to the general community, although each of these aspects of school is probably important to an extent The alarm over the condition of education grew from a perception of declining achievement test scores, rising dropout rates, and the inability of many students to perform well, either in school or later at work

State efforts to improve education have included significant increases in state funding for education in general, and for teacher remuneration in particular, the upgrading of teacher-certification standards, the establishment of scholarships for students in teacher-education programmes, a greater use of differentiated staffing patterns and career-ladders for school instructional staff, revisions to curricula, the administering of competency tests to prospective teachers and students and improvements in the preservice and inservice training of teachers

Many of these initiatives are attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes However, there are demographic and economic imperatives which may limit the success of such efforts and which make the attraction and retention of teachers a major problem in and of itself

THE NEED TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TEACHERS

In *A nation prepared Teachers for the 21st century*, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (2) predicted that between 1986 and 1992, there will be a need for 1 3 million new teachers in the United States

The US Department of Education (17) had also projected that demand for teachers will increasingly outstrip supply each year from 1984 through 1993 (see Table 1) Although in 1984 the supply of new teachers exceeded demand, supply is estimated to fall to only 60% of demand by 1993 This will occur because of a decline in the absolute numbers of new teacher graduates together with an increase in the total number of additional teachers needed

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED SUPPLY OF NEW TEACHER GRADUATES COMPARED TO ESTIMATED DEMAND FOR ADDITIONAL TEACHERS UNITED STATES 1984 93

Fall of Year	Estimated Supply of New Teachers Graduates	Estimated Demand for Additional Teachers	Supply as Percentage of Demand
1984	146 000	143 000	102 1
1985	146 000	158 000	92 4
1986	144 000	165 000	87 3
1987	142 000	171 000	83 0
1988	139 000	162 000	85 8
1989	139 000	177 000	78 5
1990	139 000	188 000	73 9
1991	138 000	204 000	67 6
1992	137 000	215 000	63 7
1993	133 000	211 000	63 0

It will be difficult to recruit an adequate number of teachers unless dramatic changes are made in the conditions of teachers' remuneration and professional status Other occupations are often more rewarding and women, who traditionally filled the ranks of teachers in disproportionate numbers, as well as minority-group members, are more likely to explore other occupational opportunities which are now open to them, as government and industry move closer to meeting their equal-opportunity goals

The fact that many beginning teachers become discouraged and abandon teaching compounds the problem In some school districts, as many as 40% of beginning teachers leave within their first two years of service (22) At the national level, 15% of beginning teachers leave the profession in each of their first two years of teaching, a further 10% leave by the end of their third year, while about two-thirds of those who will leave do so within the first four years Further, beginning teachers who leave the profession tend to be the most academically talented (20)

At a time when the replacement and retention of teachers is becoming a critical problem, the number of school-age children is rising, 'echoing' the baby-boom period following World War II There are also significant increases in the number of immigrant children Further, the proportions of children from minority groups who have limited English-language proficiency or who are

disadvantaged are increasing, giving rise to an increased demand for more intensive instructional support and further increasing the demand for teachers

Given the costs of significantly upgrading teacher salaries and benefits and a general climate of tax reductions by governments, it is unlikely that a salary increase can be sufficient in itself to attract more people to education and hold them in the teaching profession

The Carnegie Forum (2) suggested that if the best-educated people are to be attracted to teaching, teaching must be accorded a higher standing as a profession Professionals, it was further noted, define the standards used to evaluate the quality of work done, decide what standards are used to judge the qualifications of other professions in their field, and have a major voice in the programme of preparation for professionals in their field These characteristics of a profession have commonly been lacking in teaching However, emerging teacher-induction programmes can do much to improve this situation and, at the same time, enhance the likelihood that beginning teachers will be successful and make teaching their career

PROBLEMS OF THE BEGINNING TEACHER

Teachers are not usually introduced to important skills in a progressively more demanding or systematic way A beginning teacher usually has, from the first day, as much classroom responsibility as a veteran teacher, and the opportunities for inservice education are limited While in most professions, new graduates learn from more experienced colleagues during their first years on the job, the teaching profession is largely characterized by 'sink or swim' or 'trial by fire' situations for beginning teachers

Veenman (21) noted that the problems of beginning teachers have been studied since the turn of the century and reviewed 83 studies carried out since 1960 Most of these studies, 55 of them, were conducted in the United States The others were carried out in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, Austria, Switzerland, and Finland Despite differences in the countries in which the studies were conducted and differences in the study methods which were used, the problems of beginning teachers were found to be very much alike Veenman reasoned that this probably meant that the problems of beginning teachers cannot be attributed solely to personal characteristics, the

work-place situation, or to deficiencies in teacher training, but must also result from factors inherent in the job of teaching itself and in teaching as a profession

Johnson and Ryan (8) determined from accumulated research findings that the professional problems of beginning teachers can be grouped within the broad areas of discipline and classroom management, planning and organization, evaluation of student work, motivation of students, and adjustment to the teaching environment Veenman (21) had also found that among twenty-four frequently perceived problems, classroom discipline was considered the most serious problem area for beginning teachers This was followed, in rank order, by motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relations with parents, and organization of classwork

While beginning teachers, like new workers in all work settings, 'are largely dependent on their more experienced colleagues to teach them the procedures for coping with the demands made upon them by their supervisors and subordinates' (4, p 106), a study of Canadian teachers revealed that beginning teachers hesitated to ask for help for fear of appearing to be incompetent, while experienced teachers were reluctant to volunteer help for fear of appearing to interfere As a result, information on practices, techniques, and materials used by experienced teachers had to be gleaned by beginning teachers from overheard conversations, casual visits to classrooms before or after school, discreet looks at materials left in sight, or observing experienced teachers through open classroom doors (16)

Help has not always been forthcoming from other sources either Howsan, Corrigan, Denemark and Nash (5) cited the environment of the beginning teacher as a 'professional desert' and portrayed beginning teachers as 'abandoned by the institutions where they received their preservice education and neglected by overburdened supervising personnel' (p 101) Teacher-preparation programmes are by and large general and theoretical and, once in the classroom, beginning teachers need help to deal with the doubts, stress, and logistical realities of teaching as well as with the expectations of others

The help provided by school administrators to beginning teachers is necessarily limited because of constraints on the time an administrator can spare to observe and confer with teachers When an administrator does observe a teacher, it is usually to determine whether or not the teacher is performing well

enough to continue in his or her position Improving the teacher's competence is usually only a secondary consideration

It would seem that beginning teachers, as much as they need help, in practice learn to solve their problems very much on their own (see 10) Unfortunately, if proper assistance is not available, they may become uncomfortable and lose confidence in their abilities They may also develop techniques and classroom management and teaching styles which inhibit their effectiveness It is to deal with this situation that many states have taken action in recent years to encourage or require teacher-induction programmes

TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMMES

Schlechty (19) identified as the purpose of induction the development in new members of an occupation of 'those skills, forms of knowledge, attitudes and values that are necessary to effectively carry out their occupational roles' (p 37) Programmes of induction for beginning teachers can encompass such activities as orientation meetings, seminars and training sessions, classroom observations, follow-up conferences with observers, consultations, and opportunities to observe other teachers These induction activities serve the basic purpose of improving the performance of beginning teachers, increasing the retention rate of teachers, possibly screening out the least promising teachers, and promoting teachers' personal and professional well-being (6)

As greater attention has been given to teacher-induction practices as part of educational-reform efforts, the states have begun to enact teacher-mduction programmes which vary in their scope and in the degree to which they are mandatory In some, the successful completion of a teacher-induction programme has been made a requirement for certification Just before the National Commission on Excellence in Education was appointed, only one state (Georgia) had a teacher-mduction programme (10) A later national survey by Defino and Hoffman (3) revealed that four states (Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, and South Carolina) had such programmes Three others (Arizona, Oregon, and North Carolina) had initiated pilot programmes for teacher induction, while several other states were at the stage of planning programmes Since then the number of states which are planning, experimenting with, or mandating teacher-induction programmes has increased each year Some university-based and local district programmes have also been operating, some for years, in many locations throughout the country independently of state direction

THE ASSIGNMENT OF MENTOR TEACHERS TO BEGINNING TEACHERS

On the basis of a review of teacher-induction programmes, Johnson (7) recommended that the following elements be included in such a programme (i) the assignment of specially selected and trained experienced teachers to provide emotional and technical support to beginning teachers in a non-evaluative role, (ii) released time from regular teaching responsibilities for both the helping teachers and the beginning teachers for planning, discussing problems and strategies, and developing materials, and (iii) the co-operative involvement of teacher-training institutions, the state, and local school district in promoting induction efforts

The National Commission on Excellence in Education (15) also had recommended that master teachers be involved both in supervising probationary teachers and in peer-review teacher-evaluation systems Following this report, the National Commission For Excellence in Teacher Education (14) recommended that all states should develop for teacher candidates an internship or other induction experience beyond the provisional certification requirement Compensation and reduced teaching loads were also recommended to enable interns to participate in professional-development activities

In the report of the 1985 Metropolitan Life Survey of Former Teachers (12), it was observed that both current and former teachers strongly support educational reforms which increase the professionalism of teaching Further, more than 55% of those surveyed in each of those groups thought that requiring beginning teachers to serve a supervised internship before being certified would help improve the quality of teaching

Indeed, the major component of most teacher-induction programmes in the United States is the assignment of an experienced teacher as a mentor to a beginning teacher, as part of an internship requirement Mentoring, of course, has historical roots which go back to the ancient Greeks where it was an aspect of Homer's *Odyssey* and practiced by Socrates and Plato

Mentoring is a helping process in which the mentor serves as a role model, offers advice, provides valuable information and, in general, can draw on experience to put situations in perspective and give support Some schools have a long tradition of 'buddy' teachers who serve many of the functions of a mentor,

though most often they do this informally, and not as part of a formal induction programme with an evaluation component

Various approaches to developing mentor-teacher programmes have been taken by the states Not all have provided enough release time, however, to allow the provision of consistent and meaningful attention to teachers in need of assistance For example, a mentor-teacher programme in Illinois, in which mentors were allowed only three days out of the school year to assist other teachers has been described as only 'a token effort' (11) A little more time was provided in a programme in the State of Washington Mentor and beginning teachers were given a total of four days during the school year in which they were free from classroom assignments for consultation and observation purposes (9) In this programme, 100 experienced classroom teachers were selected to serve as mentors to an equal number of beginning teachers under the sponsorship of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

In the New York State Mentor Teacher-Internship Program, intern teachers are released for at least 20% of their time to enable them to receive a substantial amount of special training and assistance from a mentor teacher In addition, a mentor teacher provides guidance and supervision during the time that the intern teacher is engaged in regular classroom teaching Participation by school districts in the New York programme is voluntary, in 1986-87, its first year of operation, only 33 of the State's 774 districts submitted a plan to the state to implement a local programme

There are various reasons why school districts choose not to participate in voluntary state-initiated mentor-teacher programmes In a California Tax Foundation survey of 24 school districts, only five were found to be not participating in the state's mentor-teacher programme, which had been in existence since the 1983-84 school year Of the five, three were small, a fourth already had an extensive staff-development programme and the fifth one did not participate 'in the interest of labour peace at the request of the employee association' (18, p 9)

Some states, such as Florida and Oklahoma, mandate entry-year internships for beginning teachers and certification is dependent on the successful completion of the induction internship As Barnes (1) has noted, however, when successful completion of an internship is tied to certification, the fundamental nature of the experience changes from one of assistance and support to one of

evaluation This results in a more formal relationship and adds a certain amount of stress to the experience

CONCLUSION

The 1986 Metropolitan Life survey of teachers (13) revealed interesting divergence of opinion between teachers on the one hand and various leadership groups, including educational administrators and policy makers, on the other While significantly lower percentages of teachers supported merit-pay and career-ladder initiative, mentor-teacher programmes were enthusiastically supported by all of the groups surveyed

In practice, a mentor-teacher programme can incorporate some of the positive aspects of other reform initiatives The appointment of mentor teachers and the requirement of an internship for beginning teachers create three separate classifications of teachers - mentor teachers, regular teachers, and intern teachers If the three categories of teacher are differentially compensated, the additional pay and/or reduced classroom time would clearly indicate additional responsibility and merit for some Mentor teacher-intern programmes, therefore, have many benefits They can be one way in which teachers are given greater responsibility for how well their profession performs and thus increase the professional status of teaching At the same time, they provide a means of rewarding outstanding teachers with recognition and higher pay Induction programmes also increase the likelihood that beginning teachers will be successful, remain as teachers, and perform better as teachers In the long run, student learning, should improve

It is of course necessary that teachers, school administrators, and school-board members work co-operatively if a school district is to be able to plan and develop a mentor programme Even under the best of circumstances, this will involve a process of idea sharing and negotiation Some school administrators might feel threatened by the official assumption of an evaluative role in the schools by teachers, but a mentor programme need not and should not wholly supplant the administrative function of deciding to retain or dismiss teachers on the basis of performance It may be that the intern teacher, an administrator, an experienced teacher, and perhaps a faculty member of a teacher-training college could together form an evaluative committee to perform the separate purpose of evaluation for certification

Mentor-teaching programmes offer promise as a positive means of improving teacher performance by individuals and by the profession collectively, thereby strengthening the teaching profession and improving educational outcomes However, if such programmes are to attract well-qualified persons to teaching, and retain them in the profession, then mentor teachers and beginning teachers must be permitted to establish and carry out their relationship without the added burden and tension of a formal evaluative role for the mentor teacher Further, if completion of a successful internship is to be a requirement for certification and a teacher is expected to participate in evaluation of the intern teacher, it might be best if that function were performed by an experienced teacher other than the mentor In any event, state teacher-induction programmes in the United States are very likely to continue to vary widely in their scope and structure, and their effects and costs will need to be monitored closely Because of the wide diversity in programmes throughout the United States, the results of evaluation should provide useful information to other countries as well

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