

2007

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Sosa, Jenifer, "The first five years : providing adequate support and resources for new teachers" (2007).
Capstone Projects and Master's Theses. 355.
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Running Head: The First Five Years

**The First Five Years: Providing Adequate Support and Resources for
New Teachers**

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Fall 2007**

Abstract

The focus issue is that our school systems are having a high teacher turnover rate within the first five years of teaching and it is leading to many problems. This is becoming very common in the teaching pathway which is affecting the students, teachers, schools and the community. It is important to me because I am a future teacher and I want to help make a change because education is essential and our children deserve the best education. I wrote a letter for my action project and I plan on mailing the letter to different schools, principals, and the Board of Education. My intentions are to improve the teaching preparation with new teacher induction programs and more support for teachers, as well as a pay increase. Teachers work very hard, they strive for the best for their students. Teachers deserve a lot more credit for their important role they have in the world.

“Setting the Stage”

My name is Traci Wright¹ and I just finished my teaching credential at California State University of Sunny Bay. I am very excited to begin my teaching career, but at the same time I am nervous. I recently got hired as a first grade teacher at Sunshine Elementary School in North Valley Unified School District. This school is kindergarten through fifth grade and there are 623 students (<http://pajarovalley.schoolwisepress.com/home/>). The majority of the students that attend this school are Latino (95.6%) (<http://www.muninetguide.com/school.php?school=294900836844>).

Today is my official first day of teaching and I am just hoping that I am going to do a good job. Now that the actual day has come, I feel worried that I am going to panic and not know what to do with my class. I do not know any other teachers and I feel like I am weak when it comes to dealing with classroom management. I have had little experience with teaching children and I have never been alone in a classroom. While I was in school the classes I took were interesting, but I feel like they did not fully prepare me for going straight into a teaching job right after I finished my credential.

I have heard a lot of horrible stories about new teachers having a hard time with their teaching career because there seems to be a lack of teacher readiness and teacher support. While I was doing my credential last year there were two teachers, Mr. Smith and Ms. Jones that were not happy with their jobs and Ms. Jones actually quit in the middle of the school year. I wanted to talk to her and see what she had to say and why she was so unhappy, but I was never able to directly talk to her. I heard some of the other

¹ All proper names are pseudonyms

faculty talking about the reasons she had given for leaving her teaching position. They said that she was complaining about her students out of control behavior and that she did not know how to handle them. She also felt like she had no one to lean on for support and that she felt like she just was not well prepared and she did not have any idea about what to expect. After I heard them saying all that I thought to myself, “How could she not know what to expect? and why can’t she control her students?” But now that I am the new teacher walking to my new classroom, I am asking myself if I feel well prepared and if I am going to be able to discipline my students. I just hope that my students like me and that they take me seriously, even though I am really short and I look very young. Well, here I go, I just hope everything turns out okay, and I hope I meet some helpful fellow teachers that can help guide me in the right direction.

What is the Problem and why is it an issue?

The focus issue is that our school systems have a high teacher turnover rate within the first five years of teaching and it is leading to many problems (Barnett, Hopkins-Thompson & Hoke, 2002). I am attending college to be a future teacher and I do not want to be one of the teachers that went to school for four years, and achieved a teaching credential and once they started teaching, realized that they wanted to change careers. This is becoming very common in the teaching pathway which is affecting the students, teachers, school and the community. Education is a very critical aspect of life that every child needs and if we don’t have intrigued, well educated, and well prepared teachers then that is where the problems began.

This problem of high teacher turnover rate is local, authentic, and urgent because many of our local schools that surround us are having the same problems. While I was

doing my service learning I was working with a kindergarten teacher and she was telling me how short-handed they are on teachers. They had a few emergency credential teachers that were teaching at the school. She said that those teachers just seem so lost because they were placed into a classroom with not much direction or support. While she was telling me this, I was thinking how horrible these situations were. If the “teachers” don’t know what is going on or know what to teach, then how do we expect the students to learn what they need to know in order to make progress and be up to standards? I know that I would not want my children’s to be juggled between teachers. That would disrupt their learning as well as their comfort level with their teachers. I think something needs to be done before more problems are created for our school systems.

Children are impacted negatively by the problem in many ways. Teachers are saying that they feel they are not well prepared and this leads to many problems with, class management, organization, discipline, and over-all student achievement (Hare & Heap, 2001). Teachers are also impacted negatively because they go into the teaching profession thinking that it is their passion to teach, but once they begin teaching there are many concerns and problems that arise. There are many other states that have new-teacher induction programs that are highly effective (Hare & Heap, 2001). School districts need to look at the schools and realize that something needs to be done in order to keep their teachers to have an effective school system.

The Research Literature

New Teacher Induction Programs. In the article *Assessing and Supporting New Teachers* by Berry Barnett, Peggy Hopkins-Thompson and Mandy Hoke (2002), new teacher induction programs are said to be under-conceptualized, under-developed, under-

supported, and under-funded in the American public education system. We have known for decades that no matter how good teacher education is, the complexities of effective teaching are such that teachers will never know what exactly what to expect when they enter their first classroom. Schools must have sound induction programs in which new teachers are both assessed and supported as they grow toward becoming expert classroom leaders. Without such support, many beginning teachers resort to survival instructional strategies, struggle alone, and leave the profession early in their careers at alarmingly high rates. This article also says that states and districts think that teacher shortages are the main problem so they spend more and more money on programs that “address” the teacher shortage but do little to assure teacher quality. Quality induction programs also provide novice teachers with a network of new and experienced teachers with whom they can share concerns, discuss issues, and explore solutions. In addition to increasing retention among novice teachers, good induction programs attract new teachers to a district as the school system’s reputation for teacher support spreads. Good programs increase teacher effectiveness across the board as experienced teachers grow professionally by serving in mentor roles.

Hare and Heap (2001) also agree that there needs to be more induction / mentoring programs. In the article it says that implementing induction programs would be good to extend the preparation period of novice teachers through their crucial first years upon the job so that they continue to develop as proficient, knowledgeable, and successful teachers of our nation’s children. Effective programs also improve the climate for teaching and learning, build community between new and veteran teachers, and, in the process, help address urban schools’ ‘brain drain’ of teachers to the suburbs.

The researchers surveyed 2,314 superintendents and fifty-two percent of them who have implemented and rated a new teacher support program reported that the program has been “very successful” in reducing attrition. Only 12 percent reported their program as “not very successful” in reducing attrition. Research conducted on California’s New Teachers Project supports these findings; well-designed, well-implemented induction projects reduced teacher-attrition rates by more than two-thirds. Indiana and Ohio top the region in the percentage of districts that provide training for their mentor teachers. In Indiana, this training is a requirement of districts, resulting in adoption in 61 percent of the state’s programs. Ohio leads the region, with 80 percent of its programs training mentors (Hare & Heap, 2001).

In the book, *A Better Beginning – Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers*, Margie Scherer (1999) also encourages induction programs. Induction programs are very helpful for teachers because they are focused on supporting new teachers. “A mandatory, structured induction program introduces new teachers to the culture, expectations, and vision of their district and school” (Martin & Robbins, 1999). A new-teacher induction program at Leyden High School in Franklin Park, Illinois was developed out of the need to retain strong teachers. The program started in 1996 and was called “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Teaching But Were Afraid to Ask”. It is a 30 hour course that meets Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. until 2 p.m., during the first week of August. The course combines an overview of effective teaching principles and practices with an orientation to the district, the building, the department, the staff, the students, and the community. This induction program seems like a great tool for teachers. The program is only five days but they cover different and helpful issues everyday. The topics covered

on day one are: culture, expectations, and vision. On day two they cover positive expectations, and day three is based on classroom management. On day four they discuss mastery and cooperative learning, and on the last day they go over professionalism and expectations.

Methodology

Setting. The school that I picked to survey teachers at was Sunshine Elementary in North Valley Unified School District. I selected this school by the location and based on the number of new teachers in their faculty. By visiting the California Department of Education website (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>) I was able to find statistics that indicated which schools had a large number of new teachers in their faculty, and Sunshine Elementary School was one of them.

Participants. I put a total of twenty seven surveys in teacher's boxes and unfortunately in return I only received eight surveys. Seven of the surveys that were returned were experienced teachers and the other one was filled out by an administrator. Three of the experienced teachers have been teaching for three years. One of them has taught at Sunshine Elementary for the entire three years and the other two have taught there for two years. There was one teacher that has been teaching for six years. Two other teachers have been teaching for nine years and they have work at Sunshine the whole nine years. There was a teacher that has been teaching for 25 years and has worked at Sunshine for four years. The last survey was filled out by an administrator and she/he is in their first year of being an administrator at Sunshine Elementary.

Paper and Pencil Survey. The following questions were administered in a paper and pencil survey format:

New Teacher Survey

Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching at this school: _____

1) How satisfied are you satisfied with your job?

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Very	Not at all
1	2	3	4

Why?

2) Do you feel that you were adequately prepared to enter the teaching profession? **Y / N**

Why or why not?

3) Have your expectations of what it would be like to teach been met? **Y / N**

Why or why not?

4.) What are your three biggest challenges in teaching right now?

5) What support have you received around these struggles?

6) What support would you most benefit from that you are currently not receiving?

7) In your opinion, what are some of the obstacles preventing the support from happening?

8) Would you be interested in taking part in services and/or receiving materials developed from this survey? **Y / N**

If so, please include contact information here:

Experienced Teacher Survey

Please indicate the number of years you have been a teacher: _____

Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching at this school: _____

1) How big of a problem is the turnover rate of first and second year teachers at this school? Why?

2) What were the biggest challenges you faced when you began as a teacher?

3) Do you think teachers entering the profession now are facing the same problems? **Y / N**

If no, what are some of the problems new teachers are facing?

4) Please list the three biggest factors that you see contributing to the high turnover rate among first and second year teachers and give a brief explanation.

5) What support or help did you receive as a first and second year teacher that enabled you to continue in the teaching profession?

6) What are some obstacles to improving the retention rate of first and second year teachers?

7) What ideas do you have to help first and second year teachers who are struggling continue in the teaching profession?

8) Have you taken any steps to act upon your ideas? **Y / N**

If yes, please describe the response you received from your peers, new teachers, the administration and the district.

9) Would you be interested in helping develop or take part in any services and/or materials developed from this survey? **Y / N**

If so, please include contact information here:

Administrator Survey

How long have you been an administrator at this school? _____

1) How big of a problem is the turnover rate of first and second year teachers at this school and on a district level? Why?

2) Please list the three biggest factors that you see contributing to the high turnover rate among first and second year teachers and give a brief explanation.

3) Please describe what has been done on a school and district level to address this problem.

4) What do you think should be done?

5) What are some obstacles to improving the retention rate of first and second year teachers?

6) Would you be interested in allowing us to return with any programs or resources developed from this survey? **Y / N**

Procedure. I set up a meeting with the principal, Mrs. Strong and I explained my project to her. She was very nice and understanding and she was willing to help me in any way to help me fulfill my goals for my project. I made up three different surveys: one for new teachers, one for experienced teachers, and one for administration. I had a second meeting with Mrs. Strong and I showed her the surveys and I asked how many new teachers, experienced teachers, and administration there were so I knew exactly how many

copies to make. There were a total of twenty seven teachers. Six of them were in their first or second year teaching and 21 had been teaching for more than two years. My plan was to attend a staff meeting and briefly talk and explain to them about my research project and have all the teachers fill out the surveys there, but unfortunately, due to time constraints I wasn't able to attend a staff meeting. So, Mrs. Strong and I decided to put the surveys into each of the teacher's mailboxes and she sent out an email to the teachers that gave them the date that the surveys needed to be returned by.

Data Analysis. Once I received the completed surveys I read them all thoroughly. I wrote down all of the similar things that the teachers said were the three biggest factors of the high teacher turnover rate. I noticed that a lot of the responses were very similar and there were also a few things that others did not mention. It was very interesting to see what actual teachers think since they were my main target for my research project. The top factors that the teachers said were lack of support, low wages, and the need of mentors.

Results

Out of the eight surveys that were filled out there was a variety of the number of years teaching. I was happy to see that because it gave me different perspectives. After analyzing my data I noticed there were a few common themes that the faculty wrote in the surveys.

The most common theme was **lack of support**. Here are some direct quotes that teachers wrote on the surveys: "Lack of support at site level," "No support, we are expected to do it on our own. Not enough interventions, no aids," "Unsupported by administration," "Lack of support from others, actual collaboration," "More in class

support- less meetings, less paperwork”, “Low parental support”, “MORE support”.

These teachers are lacking support from a few different places; administration, fellow teachers, and parents.

Another common theme was **low wages**. We live in California and it is very expensive to live here. Almost every teacher wrote that low wages was a big factor that contributes to the high turnover: “Low pay- high demands,” “Money is a huge factor,” “Higher pay to compensate for LONG work hours.” Low pay”, “Raise pay”, “Not enough pay- everything is going up, but our salary is not.” I have always taken low wages into consideration when I decided to become a teacher. I think most people know that teachers don’t get paid a fair amount for all the work they do and the time they spend outside of their regular work hours.

The last common theme that was mentioned was the **need mentors**. Everyone needs help sometimes; especially when you are starting a new career and do not know too much. It is nice to have someone help you, someone to be able to lean on and go to for support. The teachers think that if new teachers had mentors to help guide them when needed, it would help reduce the high turnover rate. Some of the teachers wrote: “Teacher mentors would be helpful”, “Have someone on site that will show, model, and listen to new teachers”, “Need a mentor that is in the classroom”. Sometimes new teachers just need a little extra guidance to get going and to get organized.

Description and Justification of Action

Since I have researched my topic and surveyed faculty at Sunshine Elementary School I was able to find out the problems that are causing the high turnover rates for new teachers. Something needs to be done about the high turnover before our schools

lose all of their good teachers as well as our future teachers. Our children are our future and we want them to have the best education and to have the best education we need educated and well prepared teachers. I decided to write a letter to send to the school boards, superintendents, and principals and hopefully open their eyes to this big problem that needs to be solved. The letter explains that there is a problem and I use the research information and quotes from the teachers to prove the problem. I express that there needs to be a change in order to help our teachers so they can be the finest teachers that actually enjoy teaching and have all the help and support they can possibly have.

Below is my letter:

December 7, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a future teacher attending California State University of Monterey Bay. I currently finished my senior capstone project, "The First Five Years: Providing Adequate Support and Resources for New Teachers". Teacher shortages are on the rise; many teachers are starting their teaching career and shortly after deciding to change professions. This is affecting students, teachers, and schools.

After researching and surveying new teachers, experienced teachers, and the administration at a local school I was able to see the problems. Teachers feel that they are not well prepared, and they have little support from fellow peers, administration, and parents. Teachers also have very high demands that require a lot of extra time while their wages are very low. How do we expect our children to have the best education if our teachers are not well prepared and they have little help and support?

Something needs to be done before our educational system gets worse. There should be new teacher induction programs for all new teachers, more support and better wages. Mentors are also very helpful in guiding new teachers in the right successful direction.

So, please take this into consideration and began to make a change so our children can have the enriching education they deserve taught by well educated, well prepared, and supported teachers.

Respectfully,

Jenifer Sosa

Critical Reflection

On Action Taken. I am very happy with the letter that I wrote and I hope it is a start in making a change in the school systems. I think that I found out a lot of important information that needs to be addressed and well thought out because obviously the teacher situation is not all working out the way it should be. I think it is very important for everyone to know what a struggle a lot of new teachers as well as many experienced teachers have in the teaching field. Education is number one and we need to make sure we keep the process going strong so our teachers can provide our children with an enriching education.

I wish there was more time to devote to the action project because I would really like to help start the process of making a change. I would like to attend a board meeting or several meetings that deal with the school systems and share my letter and my thoughts and opinions with them. I think that I have a strong argument that should be heard by everyone whether you're a teacher, principal, student, or parent because this affects us all.

If I were to do this project over I would personally go and interview the teachers and administration so I could get more of a personal feeling and be able to ask them questions in return to their responses. Other than that I am very happy with the way everything turned out. I just wish that I would have had a larger number of returned surveys, but the amount that I received was very helpful and they still made a huge impact on my project as well as myself. Since I am a future teacher and looking forward

on seeing a change I am going to continue my research and make sure there is a change made in order to keep and attract remarkable teachers.

On Lessons Learned

From this project I learned that from just trying to figure out such a big problem, researching, analyzing the data collected and thriving to make a change is very pleasing. I am really happy with the outcome and I feel like it helped me better myself as a person as well as a future teacher. I know what I need to do in order to be a successful teacher and I am going to keep fighting until teachers get what they deserve.

The MLOs and content areas that I accomplished were, knowledge and lifelong learning, orientation, foundations, and perspectives in the major, and critical communication in English, language, and literature. I learned a lot of valuable things that I will take into consideration and use in my future teaching career. I also feel like I now have so much knowledge and information that I will benefit from now and in the future.

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