When veteran meets novice

Both parties learn in a partnership of advisor and advisee

By Janet Gless and Ellen Moir

Teacher induction doesn’t have to be just for novices. The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP) has worked with nearly 2,000 beginning teachers over 12 years to learn that thoughtfully designed teacher induction programs can support the development of novices and the veteran teachers who guide them. The result is nothing less than teacher quality squared.

Veteran teachers take on a new professional role as teachers of teachers when guiding and supporting new colleagues. Our SCNTP experience demonstrates that this new role leads to remarkable changes in the seasoned teachers’ practices and attitudes. Not only are they reinvigorated and renewed, but classroom teachers learn to see themselves as professional leaders with the power and responsibility to impact the educational system.

What does an induction program look like that simultaneously develops beginners and veterans? What do these mentors learn and practice that leads to exceptionally high retention rates over the long term, evidence of improved teacher quality, and student achievement? What does this “new breed” of experienced teacher leaders look like, and how are they different?

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Performance-based licensure program doesn’t leave beginners alone

BY KERMIT BUCKNER

In a USA Today article, “No teacher should be an island unto herself,” Donna Harrington-Lueker reported the frustrations of beginning teachers who received little support during their induction into teaching.

The report quoted a North Carolina teacher who said, “The frustration was just so great ... I remember thinking, ‘I don’t know what to do, and no one’s helping me.’”

Ironically, the North Carolina Performance-Based Licensure Program, designed to support beginning teachers, was in the final stages of development as this report was being written.

North Carolina’s Performance-Based Licensure (PBL) Program was designed to support beginning teachers and hold them accountable for demonstrating that they have met state beginning teacher standards. Implemented in the 2000-2001 school year, it replaces a licensure process driven by the principal’s summative evaluation of beginning teachers. The lessons learned in North Carolina may be instructive as other states and districts struggle to raise teaching standards, retain teachers, and attract new teachers to the profession.

THE PROBLEM

In the mid-1990s, officials at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) discovered that about 30 percent of beginning teachers in North Carolina were leaving the classroom early in their careers. Research linked the exodus to little support during induction, as described by the teacher.

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they making a difference?

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Since 1988, the SCNTP has been releasing outstanding veteran teachers from classroom responsibilities for two to three years to work full time with up to 15 first- and second-year teachers. Called new teacher advisors, these experienced teachers meet for about two hours weekly with each new teacher before, during, or after school.

In addition, new teachers receive two to three release days for observing other teachers, curriculum planning, reflection, and self-assessment. At a monthly seminar series, new teachers share their dilemmas and successes with peers.

The partnership between the full-time new teacher advisor and the novice teacher, however, is at the heart of the program and fundamental to its success. Together, the novice and the veteran examine the new teacher’s classroom practice, assess strengths, and identify areas for growth in relationship to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP).

The advisor regularly collects observation data for collaborative review and analysis, helps the new teacher identify steps for improving his/her practice, and then helps the new teacher document growth over time by collecting evidence of this development. Together, they also regularly examine and analyze student work.

A carefully designed set of tools and structures helps scaffold this process of professional support and assessment that then guides the new teacher’s professional development. Key among these is a Collaborative Assessment Log, where the advisor and the new teacher record weekly successes and challenges as related to the state teaching standards, develop next steps for the new teacher, and identify necessary support. Both the new teacher and advisor keep a copy of this log.

ESSENTIAL FEATURES

The Santa Cruz program is grounded in the belief that the better the quality of the mentoring, the better the quality of a new teacher’s classroom instruction. Like good teaching, good mentoring involves complex skills and understandings that are rarely intuitive.

Just as the teaching profession recognizes that most great teachers are not born but developed, so, too, experienced teachers need time to develop into great advisors. This new role for classroom teachers requires careful training, ongoing support, and regular opportunities to reflect on and assess one’s mentoring practice.

We carefully select new teacher advisors who are not only models of effective practice, but who:

- Have strong interpersonal skills;
- Have credibility with peers and administrators;
- Demonstrate curiosity and an eagerness to learn;
- Show respect for multiple perspectives;
- Demonstrate a commitment to improving the academic achievement of all students, in particular, students of color and English language learners.

Once they are selected, advisors receive a half-day orientation to the SCNTP program, followed by two days of mentor training at the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). In this “Foundations in Mentoring” training, new advisors are asked to envision the quality teacher we are committed to developing, to examine the powerful and variable role of mentor/advisor, to understand the fundamental importance of a trusting relationship with each new teacher, to identify new teacher needs, and to use assessment data to guide the support process. When skilled veteran teachers come out of the classroom, they often are unable to deconstruct what they do well. Thus, initial training includes an introduction to the state teaching standards, opportunities to identify what the standards might look like in classroom practice, and an outline of ways to use standards to set goals for professional growth.

Subsequent staff development includes two days of coaching and observation skills training where advisors practice with videotapes as they identify evidence of the state teaching standards in practice. They are introduced to and have a chance to practice mentoring language, observation tools, and ways to present data and give feedback that promote new teacher learning and self-assessment. Through it all, advisors are reminded that they are first and foremost teachers of whose role is to help the new teachers improve their classroom practice.

Since our mentors also facilitate monthly seminars for beginning teachers, they are trained to plan and design staff development. Topics include adult learning theory, assessing the audience, setting appropriate outcomes, organizing the content, and using a repertoire of strategies that actively engages participants. The New Teacher Center at UCSC provides this training.

Just as classroom teachers benefit from having communities of peers in which to discuss and learn about their practice, advisors also need regular, ongoing opportunities to learn from and with their fellow advisors. The SCNTP’s full-time release model of mentoring enables us to do just that. Our advisors focus exclusively on the needs of their new colleagues and also are available to join advisor colleagues from across the countywide SCNTP consortium for Friday morning staff development meetings. These meetings provide a forum for new learning, problem solving, and

For information about the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP), see www.sfsu.edu/~seconed/castandards_contrib.html.

For more information on the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, see www2.ucsc.edu/people/mclaugh/nt.html.
explore current issues.

We use these Friday morning meetings to review project procedures and our assessment tools and their use. We practice observation skills with videotaped lessons of beginning teachers. We review and develop advisors’ familiarity with the state’s teaching standards, not just as a lens on good teaching but as a way to keep all eyes focused on improving new teachers’ classroom instruction. Advisors share and analyze data of their new teachers’ developing practices and then strategize how best to support a particular teacher’s continued growth. Sometimes, we focus on developing our knowledge of subject matter or content area standards, or building our expertise in literacy instruction, a priority our program has elected to set for itself, K-12. Together, we read articles, share concerns, practice facilitation and presentation skills, and think about what it means to mentor new teachers.

Just as new teachers benefit from the support of an experienced peer, so, too, do advisors. Beginning mentors are paired with experienced colleagues who model effective support and assessment practices. Together, mentors set professional learning goals, just as do the new teachers they support, and then chart their progress over the year. Partners regularly shadow and coach one another to develop the highest caliber of practice possible.

So, what does this new role for veteran teachers signify for our profession, and how can it make a difference?

**NEW ROLE FOR THE PROFESSION**

Providing support to novice teachers is parallel to classroom teaching. By temporarily stepping out of their own classrooms of children into the classrooms of 12 to 15 novices, these exceptional veteran teachers impact the quality of instruction for hundreds of children.

This new role acknowledges the significant professional knowledge residing in classrooms. Who better can identify the challenges and the complexities of teaching in today’s schools than those who are intimately connected with those classrooms and those students? Our profession needs leadership roles for teachers that capitalize on the sophisticated expertise involved in being an outstanding classroom teacher.

Additionally, advising new teachers is a powerful form of professional development that furthers these advisors’ knowledge of pedagogy and helps them take apart what they know, ultimately producing ever more capable teachers.

When mentors rotate back into the classroom, they do so with a new vision of teacher as learner and a new set of professional norms. Few of us in education have lived in school cultures that demand collaboration, foster inquiry into teaching practice, and ask us to collect systematically and review data of our professional practice, but these are the norms that show student learning and effective instruction at the heart of our professional development.

New and legitimate leadership roles for teachers can change the nature of our profession and the fabric of our educational systems. Releasing veteran teachers full time from classroom duties for the express purpose of inducting new colleagues into the profession represents a significant commitment both to teachers and students. It’s a powerful statement about what matters most in our schools — “a caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child.” Thoughtfully-designed induction programs honor and capitalize upon the expertise and knowledge of our most talented veterans by creating systems that foster ambitious levels of mentoring in support of new teacher practice. It’s teacher quality squared.

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THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

North Carolina’s Performance-Based Licensure program is based on the following guiding principles:

- Beginning teachers should be responsible for demonstrating that they are competent.
- Pre-service, induction, and service should be connected.
- Teaching is a complex activity that requires giving teachers autonomy to present authentic evidence that reflects their knowledge and skill.
- Professionals govern themselves.
- A mentor is essential for the formative development of a beginning teacher.
- Employment and licensure decisions should be separate.
- Teacher licensure must be legal, valid, and reliable.

THE PILOTS

The PBL pilots provided beginning teachers with a mentor, limited teachers’ extracurricular duties, provided reasonable class assignments, and offered an orientation to the system. Beginning teachers also were expected to create a portfolio-like document (called a product) to demonstrate they could meet the new state licensure requirements. The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards provided the criteria for developing and assessing products. The department of education used INTASC standards to train product assessors and evaluate their ability to accurately assess beginning teachers.

The pilots revealed a number of strengths and weaknesses in PBL:

- INTASC standards provided a solid basis for licensure criteria. Beginning teachers, assessors, and higher education faculty found them to be appropriate standards that provided a common language to talk about teaching. INTASC standards also defined teaching in a way that was consistent with state standards. But it was evident early in the piloting that the 10 INTASC standards and their accompanying indicators were difficult to manage, and they were consolidated into clusters to simplify the process.

- The freedom given beginning teachers to demonstrate they were “at standard” was problematic. Beginning teachers continually asked, “Now what do you really want to see in my product?” Assessors asked, “How can I make consistent judgments about these teachers if they all present different kinds of evidence in their products?” The process was, therefore, modified to include required pieces of evidence and allow teachers to include other evidence of their choosing.

- Training for assessors had prepared them for their task. A study of assessors’ evaluations during the pilot proved they could make highly reliable judgments about a beginning teacher’s performance (Jaeger, 1999).

- The handbook created to guide beginning teachers who submitted products for review proved to be helpful. (The handbook is available online at www.dpi.state nc.us/pbl/index.html).

- The three-year PBL cycle in which the teacher obtains information about PBL in year one, develops a product for submission in year two, and if necessary, resubmits sections in which he or she was found to be below standard in year three had proven to be effective.

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At the end of piloting, all seemed to be in place to implement PBL for teachers who would complete their second year of teaching in 1999-2000.

POST-PILOT ISSUES

As plans for statewide implementation were being finalized, questions and concerns arose. Some administrators and teachers asked why a new licensure process was needed. PBL was attacked on the grounds that it would drive away beginning teachers from North Carolina. The link between support and assessment, so evident to the developers, was not evident to the critics. In addition, some of the tools (forms, logs, etc.) in the handbook (developed during the pilots to ease the beginning teacher’s task) were criticized for making the product development task unmanageable. Some pointed to the inch-thick guide as proof the process was intimidating and created unreasonable extra work for beginning teachers.

Principals voiced concerns about being cut out of the licensure loop. The state developed and funded mentoring for beginning teachers, but critics pointed to variance in the quality of mentoring...
programs during the pilots. With all of the demands for accountability being placed on teachers, most of them reported they had no time to mentor a beginning teacher. Others took the money, but did little. It was clear in summer 1999 that the transition from evaluation-based licensure to performance-based licensure would not be smooth.

**POLITICS OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

Performance-Based Licensure (PBL) was to have been implemented across North Carolina in the 1999-2000 school year. It was not. A challenge to the state board’s “fast track” method of enacting several new policies, including PBL, caused the reversal. In a reform-weary state, some educators seemed to be sending a message that they had had enough. This message was not well received by the governor, the legislature, and the state board, who all felt that they had made major commitments to improve education and teacher salaries based on raising teaching standards — including standards for beginning teachers.

Department of education officials realized that PBL’s success depends as much on how it is implemented as on the quality of its design and the reliability of its findings. The NCDPI had to modify a tested, reliable process to make it more acceptable to those who would implement it. At meetings with significant stakeholders (elected officials, teacher associations, state board representatives, regional personnel responsible for implementation, etc.), key decision makers made it clear that some form of performance-based licensure would be implemented. The most significant changes resulting from those meetings were:

- Reorganization of the five activities into a three-component process that still fully addressed INTASC standards. (See box on the previous page.)
- Modification of the beginning teacher’s guide to simplify and eliminate all nonessential information.
- Modification of required forms that included data beginning teachers had difficulty obtaining (data not available within the product development timeline, etc.).
- A disclaimer stating that PBL is subject to change yearly based on feedback.

**CONCLUSIONS**

New programs aimed at improving teacher quality and student performance will continue to be implemented. Many variables will dictate an initiative’s ultimate success or failure. The development of the PBL in North Carolina brought several variables into clear focus:

- Each new reform in a reform-weary state will be criticized and challenged more than the last. Expect challenges to new programs. Be prepared to negotiate compromises among powerful players whose acceptance of the program is critical.
- Communication about new programs is essential. Implementers may not listen until the reform impacts them directly.

New ways of “getting the word out” are needed.

- Grassroots communication is best. Implementers want to hear from individuals who were directly involved in a program pilot.
- No program, however well designed and statistically reliable, will work if it is not supported by those who implement it. Winning the support of the implementers must be part of the program design. Never assume the absence of negative feedback means general approval.
- Support from key leaders is essential. There is no doubt that PBL would have been dead without the support it got from the key education decision makers in North Carolina.

In the final analysis, the success of North Carolina’s Performance-Based Licensure will depend on teachers and administrators who implement it. If beginning teachers are not supported through strong mentoring programs funded and mandated by the state and school district, they will feel like the teacher who said, “If I had had to do one of those products to get a license, I would have moved to another state to teach.” On the other hand, PBL’s potential is captured by a beginning teacher in one of the pilots who said, “It was a lot of work and I didn’t want to do it, but I will have to admit that going through the product development process helped me become a better teacher.”

**REFERENCES**

