



## A national survey of induction and mentoring: How it is perceived within communities of practice



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Differences in perceptions of induction and mentoring in NZ schools were found.
- Most favorable views expressed by school leaders and mentors.
- Several factors, such as professional role and geographic area, interacted significantly.
- Mentors' views related to volunteering and professional development opportunities.

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a national survey of induction and mentoring. Participants were 696 New Zealand school personnel from primary and secondary schools. Respondents were drawn from five regions of the country representing both urban and rural schools of differing socioeconomic levels. Based on data from the Langdon Induction and Mentoring Survey, main effects for professional role and school sector were found. Also, several significant interactions were identified, such as for professional role by socioeconomic level. There were also effects for mentors who volunteered and who participated in professional development versus those who did not.

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*I am not a teacher, but an awakener.*

Robert Frost

As in all complex professions, there is a process entailed in the initiation of novices into communities of practice with the goal of ensuring their success and well-being (cite some classic piece here; Langdon, Alexander, Dinsmore, & Ryde, 2012). This is certainly true for the teaching profession, where induction and mentoring is considered central to the retention, attrition, and quality of new teachers and ultimately, to the success of students for whom teachers are responsible (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). Studies focused on induction and mentoring have populated the literature since the 1980s (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

Significant insights about induction have been garnered from this body of research. For instance:

- Those who receive mentoring are more apt to stay in the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004);
- Those who receive mentoring are more likely to be more committed to the profession and have a greater sense of well-being (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011);
- The quality of induction and mentoring matters in terms of novice's subsequent development (Bullough, 1992; Richter et al., 2011); and,
- School leaders make a difference to the quality of mentees' experiences (Moore Johnson, 2004; Youngs, 2007).

Despite such insights afforded by more than three decades of research, there are significant gaps in our understanding about induction and mentoring. For one, the portraits of induction and mentoring formed from the literature tend to be rather limited in perspective. For example, a substantial number of studies focus

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solely on beginning teacher perspectives of the induction and mentoring process, rather than considering these perspectives in association with other members of the school community (Cameron, Dingle, & Brooking, 2007; Flores, 2001; Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

While these surveys and interviews have provided valuable insights into teacher induction from the viewpoint of these novices, including the importance of the mentor to new teacher development, there is often no broader context into which to place such perceptions and self-reports. That is, when beginning teachers are the sole focus, there is no opportunity to compare and contrast their perceptions about induction and mentoring to others who populate the community of practice. For example, would we expect different responses from educators with more years of experience than those just beginning, or how would teachers not participating directly in induction and mentoring view the program? To address such questions, we solicited responses from key members within the educational community about induction and mentoring in order to forge a more comprehensive understanding of this foundational experience.

Further, the broader context to which we speak also entails looking at perceptions of induction and mentoring from a national standpoint not generally regarded within the extant literature. More specifically, the perspective we bring will allow us to juxtapose findings about the nature and process of induction and mentoring garnered from educators within New Zealand to those patterns described within the literature—a literature that has been notably influenced by investigations conducted primarily in the US. For example, will the effects often ascribed to socioeconomic status within the existing research (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) also manifest within New Zealand, where the annual funding base is not contingent on the economic level of the surrounding neighborhood? Will differential effects for induction and mentoring within rural versus urban schools reported in the US likewise emerge in this investigation given that much of New Zealand is sparsely populated? These are the kinds of questions that this national investigation could allow us to explore.

Moreover, while studies have shown how important mentoring is to new teacher development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2009; Richter et al., 2011), most indicate that the primary purpose of mentoring is easing novices' entry into the profession and helping them with the immediate questions and uncertainties that arise when a teacher enters the classroom for the first time (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). These investigations tend to highlight problems associated with access to mentoring, managing mentee stress, and classroom management, and they have shown that mentoring influences beginning teachers' commitment and satisfaction (Flores, 2003). Certainly, there is some evidence of movement beyond the narrow focus on beginning teachers' perceptions of induction and mentoring (Wang, Odell, & Schwillie, 2008), and beyond the role of mentors in addressing classroom problems and mentees' well-being (Bullough, 2012; Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011). Nonetheless, there is still insufficient attention in the research to the degree to which the mentor–mentee relationship sparks concern for professional growth and development, not just for mentees but for mentors as well (Hobson et al., 2009).

Further, there has been a subtle shift toward studying the context in which mentors and new teachers learn together. Such investigations generally address the influence of policy, leadership, and the school culture (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006; Gless, 2006; Youngs, 2002, 2007), but they tend to do so by surveying individual segments of the educational community (e.g., administrators, principals, beginning teachers and mentors) rather than the full

spectrum of stakeholders. Youngs's (2007) study undertaken to determine the principals' influence on new teachers' experiences deviated from this pattern in that he interviewed not just new teachers and their mentors, but also principals and other teachers from that school. Still, more investigations of induction and mentoring that involve all key members of the educational community are needed, if we are to develop a more systemic portrait of this essential process. Likewise, such systematic portrayals that afford the opportunity for cross-national examinations can significantly enrich the understanding of induction and mentoring conveyed in the existing literature.

Another concern with the portraits of induction and mentoring that populate the literature pertains to the manner in which the core concepts of induction and mentoring are communicated. Specifically, in many instances these terms have become blurred and used interchangeably (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Theoretically, induction has been defined as the entire system of policy, resources, professional development opportunities, guidance, and support provided to beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), whereas mentoring more precisely relates to guidance and support provided by a more experienced colleague to the beginning teacher. So defined, mentoring is a component of induction (Bullough, 2012). This means that these are not terms that should be used interchangeably, as often happens in the literature (Britton et al., 2003).

It may be that the aforementioned conceptual confusion has come about because mentoring has become the dominant form of induction (Martinez & Conroy, 2003), even though there are many facets to induction (e.g., policies and guidelines) and many forms of delivery (e.g. workshops and orientations). One consequence of this conceptual confounding is that the multifaceted nature of the induction system seems lost in the rhetoric. In this article, we consistently refer to the processes that support new teacher learning and development as *induction and mentoring*. The intention is not to blur the lines between these concepts or to suggest that they are synonymous, but to highlight that their integral and complementary nature is essential for effective support of beginning teacher support.

Such images of induction across international contexts and within the literature have resulted in a rather fragmented approach to investigating new teacher learning and development. As Wang et al. (2008) argued, the tendency is to study separate features of induction in the research, resulting in images of induction programs “as unilateral forces that exert influence on beginning teachers' conceptions and practices” (p. 146). Examples of the component parts that have been investigated include the effects of mentors' beliefs and practices on beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b), mentoring practices and mentees reactions (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004), and effectiveness of different induction approaches (e.g., collaborative or inquiry approaches; Gless, 2006). Thus, what appears to be lacking in the extant literature is a comprehensive investigation of induction and mentoring that not only attends to the distinctions in these concepts, but that also surveys the multifaceted nature of induction by exploring concerns about policy, leadership practices, resource availability, communication, and other component features of induction.

A further problem for current studies of induction and mentoring is that programs vary greatly in scope, ranging primarily from studies targeting a few individuals within a given school or district to investigations of induction and mentoring conducted at the state or regional level. In effect, national studies that involve representative samples of mentees, mentors, school leaders, and other school personnel are relatively rare within the literature. There are some exceptions to these more narrowly targeted studies. For one, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) used a representative U.S. sample to examine the relation between beginning teachers' perceptions of

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