SUPPORTING NEW TEACHERS
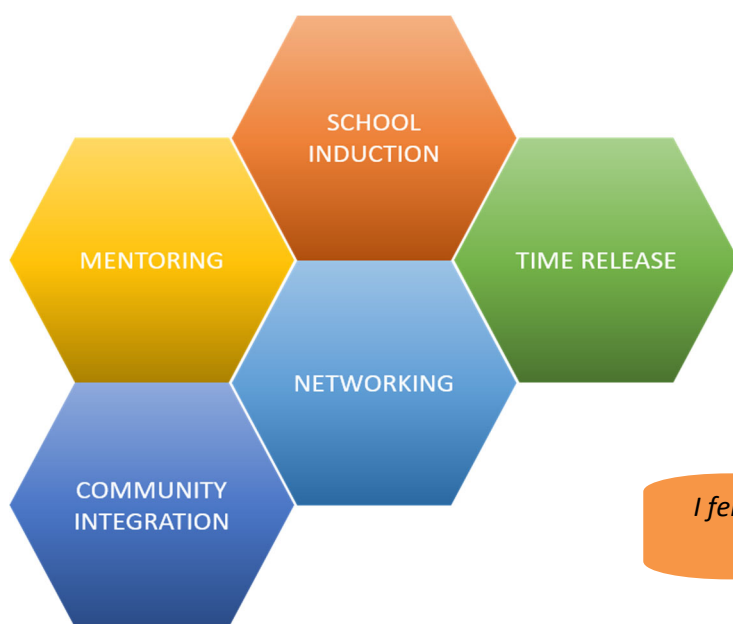

A GOOD START FOR BEGINNING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

Entering the profession is a challenging time for new teachers. Supports in schools can make the difference between new teachers finding their professional identities and dropping out.

SCHOOL INDUCTION

MENTORING

TIME RELEASE

NETWORKING

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

These key areas help new teachers adjust to professional life. In particular, mentoring and school induction offer targeted and personalised support. However, opportunities for networking and getting to know the local community, as well as provision of time for managing workload can all contribute to a successful launch into the profession.

I felt welcomed and informed from the outset.

DID YOU KNOW?

One in three beginning teachers in Australia and other OECD countries leave the profession in the first five years of service[1,4,11].

The reasons that new teachers choose to leave their chosen career so soon are diverse. Unexpectedly high workload is often cited, as is insufficient support from school leadership, particularly during the first two years of teaching[3]. A feeling of being ineffective is a further common reason, linked to low sense of professional and personal fulfilment[8,12].

Schools get so busy. You think, "It's only an hour and already I'm inundated with multiple things going on."

Relocation
In Tasmania, beginning teachers are often required to relocate to rural and regional areas to take up their first professional position. Many graduates grow up and complete their studies in an urban centre and subsequently find themselves in a small community for the first time. A need for support may be exacerbated if a new teacher has relocated, since they often leave their personal and/or professional networks behind. For some beginning teachers, the experience of a new community is stimulating and welcome. Others experience financial and emotional strain, including a sense of isolation compounded by lack of time to make new connections.

My school is a very isolated and insular community. When you come into a school like this, you're totally the outsider. There can initially be a fear or distrust, and you have to prove yourself with parents and their kids. Once you do, they accept you. But until you do, you've got to work to break through that barrier and build that trusting relationship.

The transition from initial teacher education into the profession is challenging. It takes time and experience to develop the full range of theoretical knowledge and practical skills that make a good teacher. Beginning teachers often appear highly competent. They are well-versed in the curriculum and have strong, recent theoretical knowledge. School staff may rightly ask themselves how they can best support these valuable new colleagues.

MENTORING AND SCHOOL INDUCTION

Mentors: highly valued by beginning teachers
Beginning teachers often try to solve issues on their own and cope as best they can, rather than seeking help from colleagues[9]. But research shows that collegial advice and reflection, emotional support, and practical help can equip new teachers with the resilience necessary for trying new strategies, reflecting on experience, and working towards improvement[2,6,10,13]. A formal mentoring system is an effective means of providing this kind of support. Here new teachers are automatically assigned a mentor and meeting times are timetabled to highlight the nature of the mentoring relationship as a valued and expected part of settling into the profession. Ideally, a mentor is an experienced teacher with proficiency in the same subject areas as the mentee.

Mentors benefit from support too, in the form of training and/or ready access to a second opinion[5]. A good mentor has the skills to provide structure and support while maintaining confidentiality. They can collaborate, be an advocate, share resources, give practical advice, engage in joint problem solving, and co-develop strategies with new teachers. They can also provide a judgement-free and reflective space for beginning teachers to ask questions or vent frustrations.

Feedback and reflection
Research shows that a formal, timetabled mentoring relationship can be decisive in helping beginning teachers reflect on and address issues that they experience[9].

Advice and emotional support
Collegial support, affirmation and sharing of advice help build coping strategies and a positive professional identity[2].

School and community connections
Mentors can facilitate professional and effective relationships within the school and community. These relationships can also foster the flow of professional knowledge and support between schools[3,7,8].

School induction: support reduces stress

When beginning at a new school there is often only a small window of opportunity for familiarisation with the workplace before teaching commences. There can be stress associated with getting to know and planning lessons for a new class or classes, and this can be exacerbated by smaller tasks such as managing an unfamiliar photocopy machine, searching for stationery, or learning to use administration software. School induction is valued by beginning teachers, as is ongoing initial support for documentation, differentiation, assessment and reporting expectations.

Support person/s for school procedures and processes

e.g. Administration software; attendance reporting; assessment reporting; school-wide policies, such as curriculum, behaviour management, or community engagement strategies.

Support person/s for practical tasks

e.g. how to use the photocopy machine; parking; staff room resources and expectations; locating resources; finding specific people and things.

A supportive culture

A school culture in which teachers are encouraged to actively share materials and knowledge creates a sense of belonging[3].

RELATED ASPECTS

Networking

A mentor system and a collegial school culture can support the development of networks of professional teachers. Cultivation of networks facilitates the flow of resources and knowledge as well as staff between schools. For new teachers, a network can also provide additional support and advice, including informal mentoring arrangements. These networks may be within a school, or across a number of schools.

Community integration

As any experienced teacher knows, a new school comes with its own unique community. Opportunities for meeting a range of staff and students, as well as members of the wider community, contribute to a sense of belonging and a foundation for developing rapport with students. This is especially important for teachers who have relocated to begin their new position. New teachers benefit from ready access to knowledge about whole-school approaches and strategies, such as for communicating with families or behaviour management, as well as an overview of key events that shape the school year.

Beginning Teacher Time Release

Time pressure and workload are often cited as key reasons for teachers deciding to quit the profession. It follows that releasing new teachers from the classroom for several hours each week gives an opportunity for them to cope with the demands of preparation and administration. Although variations in school resources and available office space influence the practicality of time release, it can be a valuable means of supporting beginning teachers. Regularly scheduled time release, a focus on specific activities or questions, access to mentors and a private space away from the classroom all contribute to effectiveness of beginning teacher time release.

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