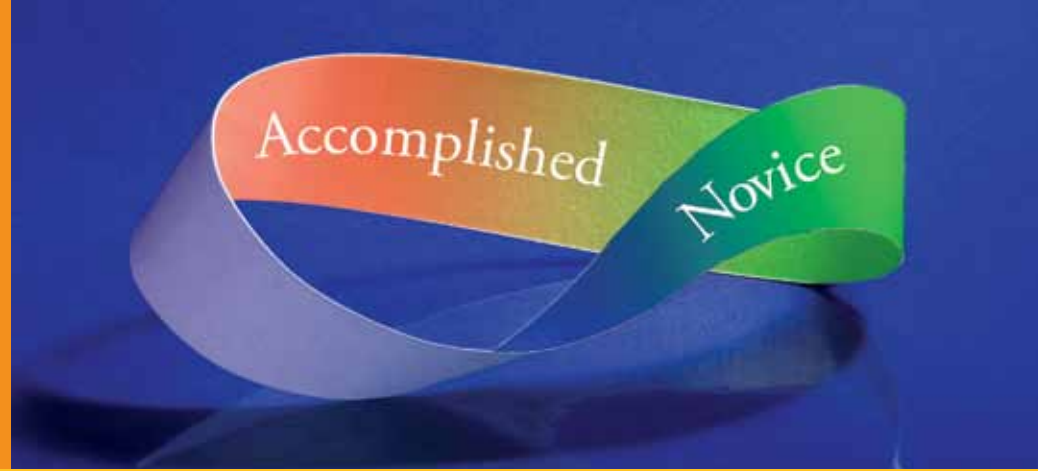


Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers–Teacher Educators [TEII-8]

Emerging Areas of Inquiry: Special Education Teacher Induction

Briefly...

General education induction has received substantial attention from policymakers, researchers, and school district practitioners. Yet, the literature base has been described as fragmented, with methodological problems that often make it difficult to draw clear implications. The special education induction literature base is even less developed. This Brief summarizes potential research areas that could help strengthen the special education induction knowledge base.

Novice teacher induction begins when a preservice teacher enters the workforce, and it may extend throughout the next several years of teaching. Induction represents a phase in development that focuses on novice teachers' concerns and problems of practice. It also serves as a catalyst for novice teacher socialization in the school. In many locales, formal induction programs help novice teachers become acclimated to the school context and develop professionally.

Mentoring is at the heart of both formal and informal induction support. Mentoring and induction influence novice special education teachers' determination to remain in teaching. Those who experience high levels of induction support tend to report greater job satisfaction and success in teaching challenging students.

Although novice special education teachers can benefit from standard induction support, they also may require additional supports that address the realities they face—such as teaching students across disability groups and in different settings, often in isolation from their general education colleagues. Challenging work conditions—such as an uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, time pressures, schedul-

ing difficulties, burdensome paperwork, and routine requirements—also can pose challenges.

It can be difficult to find suitable mentors for these novice teachers. For example, some schools have only one special education teacher, who may or may not be able to address the novice's instructional needs. Providing programs for special education teachers at the middle and high school levels who teach more than one subject presents additional challenges.

The literature base provides limited solutions to these challenges. Research is needed that identifies effective practices that can be used to support these novice teachers and foster their decision to remain in the profession. Teacher educators are in a unique position to investigate the context in which novice special education teachers work and the support strategies that may make a positive difference. This Brief summarizes some of the areas of inquiry that could provide much needed information to administrators and policymakers as they design and implement induction programs for these teachers. It also highlights several emerging areas that show promise in addressing novice special education teachers' needs.

General Mentoring and Induction

The stated purposes of teacher induction often include improving teachers' effectiveness and retention, with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. The literature base for novice special education teacher induction provides a general understanding of their experiences and the features of quality induction programs. The following areas offer examples for future inquiry.

- **Novice special education teachers' conceptualizations of their roles.** A better understanding of how teachers think about their roles and how they solve problems has implications for how they are mentored and supported.
- **Hiring and assignment practices.** Although a few studies suggest that new teachers who are uncertified or who are not prepared for their teaching assignments tend to leave the profession, little is known about how teachers are hired and assigned.
- **Mentors and other support providers.** Novice special education teachers prefer mentors who are special educators; however, these teachers also benefit from other professionals in the building who provide socialization and other support. A clear understanding of which professionals, under what circumstances, might best assist novice special education teachers is needed.
- **Frequency, proximity, and content of support.** Although novice special education teachers prefer frequency of support, they also report that the amount of support they receive is inadequate, which raises questions about the nature of the support. In terms of proximity of support, studies have been inconclusive, which raises questions about when and under what condition proximity is critical. Content of support raises even more issues in that these novice teachers request and value emotional support more than instructional content.
- **Formal and informal support.** Novice special education teachers tend to perceive informal support as more

valuable than formal support. This raises issues about how programs are designed to address their needs and the potential interface between informal and formal programs.

- **Differentiation of support.** Studies are needed to determine how teachers' who enter the profession from different paths (e.g., alternative certification routes, in-depth preparation programs) experience induction and the extent to which induction programs should be differentiated to meet their varying needs.
- **Assessment and evaluation.** Very little is known about how to assess novices' practices.

Partnerships Between Districts and Universities

Partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts enable organizations to leverage their resources as well as expand and enhance their capabilities. They also provide opportunities for personnel with specialized areas of expertise to address shared challenges. For many districts, the strongest motivation to become involved in a partnership with special education teacher educators comes from a critical shortage in the number and quality of special education teachers.

Professional Development School (PDS) programs and Alternative Route Certification (ARC) programs are among the most widely employed teacher preparation partnerships. They exemplify the range of partnerships, from the idealized, multifaceted, and high-maintenance PDS to the goal focused and pragmatic ARC.

More empirical studies are needed to fully understand the nature and outcomes of university and district partnerships. Possible areas of inquiry include:

- The development of a comprehensive, realistic, and user-friendly start-up guide to the requirements and challenges associated with the political and economic realities of

Sightings

Administrative support that addresses the particular obstacles faced by novice special education teachers strongly influences their satisfaction with their job and their determination to remain in teaching. Research is needed that:

- Describes how novice special education teachers are supervised and directed across school contexts and service delivery models.
- Identifies specific leadership roles and practices of principals who most effectively promote beginning teacher retention.
- Investigates how principals establish effective school climate and culture for novice teachers.
- Explores ways to intervene and assist district leaders, special education coordinators, principals, and mentors in the induction process.



special education teacher preparation partnerships.

- Studies linking partnership characteristics or contextual supports to induction success.
- Development of field-based internships that promote strong collaboration among district general educators and special educators and their higher education counterparts.
- An exploration of organizational structures that discourage partnerships and alternatives that foster participation.
- The development of templates that encourage and support the collection and analysis of program evaluation data.

Promising Practice: E-Mentoring

As the availability and use of technology continues to expand, e-mentoring—a practice in which mentors and mentees interact at a distance via telecommunications (e.g., e-mail, discussion board, chat room, etc.)—increasingly is finding its way into educational practice. E-mentoring offers a solution to some of the practical problems experienced by novice teachers, including:

- Having limited access to appropriate in-building mentors.
- Feeling vulnerable when asking for in-building support.
- Requiring specialized expertise that is available only at other sites.
- Finding it difficult to schedule adequate meeting time with mentors.

Although most research tends to focus on general education applications, there are promising possibilities for considering e-mentoring as a special education teacher induction practice. For example, novice special education teachers prefer mentors who also are special educators and who teach similar types of students. They benefit from having frequent contact, being in close proximity to the mentor, and receiving specialized content that supports their work. However, many novice teachers find themselves in buildings without a special education colleague who meets these criteria. While e-mentoring does not substitute for an in-building mentor who provides socialization support to a novice teacher, it can provide access to mentors with instructional expertise in the novice’s area of specialization.

Further research is needed to understand the potential of e-mentoring with novice special education teachers. Examples of research topics include:

- Understanding the impact of technology-based tools on the e-mentoring process.
- Determining the efficacy of e-mentoring as a support.

- Investigating the influence of peer interaction via the e-mentoring process.
- Studying how e-mentoring affects the questions asked, the issues discussed, the amount of communication that takes place, etc.

Promising Practice: Co-Teaching and Team Teaching

Novice special education teachers benefit by working in schools where distributed responsibility for their success is a natural outgrowth of an integrated, collaborative school culture. Although co-teaching and team teaching—both well-recognized forms of teacher collaboration—are not typically thought of in relation to the induction of new teachers, they offer a promising support strategy.

Co-teaching and team teaching provide a means for special education teachers and general education teachers to work collaboratively and to support one another in their common goal of providing a high-quality education to all students in general education classrooms. When novice special education teachers participate closely with their general education colleagues, they are more likely to view them as sources of support, and they are less likely to rely solely on special education teachers. They also tend to appreciate the opportunity to gain knowledge about the general education curriculum, which may widen their base of support and contribute to their socialization as members of the school community.

Although much has been written about co-teaching and team teaching, there is a need for inquiry into the potential of these approaches to support induction for novice special education teachers. Possibilities for future research include:

- Comparisons of the experiences of novice special education teachers who volunteer and those who are assigned to co-teaching or team teaching settings.
- Comparisons of the experiences of novice special education teachers and

○○ *Sightings*

Most states do not

- Have data systems that can answer fundamental questions such as: Do our induction programs and policies help students learn and do they help sustain teachers?
- Require summative evaluation of their induction programs and, even when evaluation is required by policy, decisions regarding methods and measures tend to be left to districts.
- Evaluate induction in terms of the return it yields on investment.



team teachers in strong and weak collaborative school cultures.

- Studies of the various sources of support valued by novice special education teachers who are co-teaching or team teaching.
- Studies of how novices who are co-teaching or team teaching implement curricular and instructional innovations.
- Comparisons of student learning in co-teaching and team teaching settings.

Promising Practice: Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities—defined here as groups of professionals in schools, typically teachers, who work collaboratively to improve practice and enhance student learning—provide a context that can promote well-designed induction programs and encourage ongoing professional development. In these schools beginning teachers are not left to their own devices. Rather, they

work closely and collaboratively with veteran colleagues.

Although most of the literature on Professional Learning Communities focuses on schoolwide efforts, special educators have been included. Professional Learning Communities may be used as a practice to integrate special education teachers into the school culture and to help provide them with important school-based socialization experiences.

Further research is needed to address the potential of Professional Learning Communities in supporting special education teacher induction. Examples follow.

- How are novice special education teachers included within schoolwide Professional Learning Communities?

- How do novice special education teachers interact in emerging and mature Professional Learning Communities?
- How do the teaching practices of novice special education teachers change as a result of being involved in a Professional Learning Community?
- How does special education teachers' participation in a Professional Learning Community affect the achievement of students with disabilities?

Learn More. This Brief summarizes select findings from four comprehensive reviews of the literature conducted by the National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP):

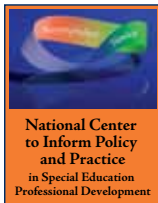
Billingsley, B. S., Griffin, C. C., Smith, S. J., Kamman, M., & Israel, M. (2009). *A review of teacher induction in special education: Research, practice, and technology solutions.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-1). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

Hirsch, E., Rorrer, A., Sindelar, P. T., Dawson, S. A., Heretick, J., & Jia, C. L. (2009). *State policies to improve the mentoring of beginning special education teachers.* (NCIPP Doc. No. PA-1). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

Pugach, M. C., Blanton, L. P., Correa, V. I., McLeskey, J., & Langley, L. K. (2009). *The role of collaboration in supporting the induction and retention of new special education teachers.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-2). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

Rosenberg, M. S., Brownell, M., McCray, E. D., deBettencourt, L. U., Leko, M., & Long, S. (2009). *Development and sustainability of school-university partnerships in special education teacher preparation: A critical review of the literature.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-3). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

All are available on the NCIPP website at www.ncipp.org.



This Brief is part of a series designed to help special education teachers during their initial years in the profession. The National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (cooperative agreement # H325Q070002). Bonnie Jones is the OSEP Project Officer. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. NCIPP aims to inform special education policy and practice by examining and recommending those policies and practices that improve the retention and quality of beginning special education teachers. There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please use proper citation. The Briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy and Associates.

© 2010 NCIPP. University of Florida, 360 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611 • (352) 273-4259 • ncipp@coe.ufl.edu

