

Starting out [supplementary chapter]

Learning as a newly qualified teacher

Introduction

In this chapter we focus on the role of reflection in the first year of teaching – the 'induction' period. The chapter will be of particular interest if you are a newly qualified teacher, or you are about to become one, or if you are an induction tutor.

To get 'first things first' though, the most crucial question when starting a teaching career is to think about 'the sort of teacher you want to be', as Smith and Coldron (1998) put it. This issue also relates back to the first chapter of *Reflective Teaching in Schools*, on values and identity.

A key theme of the chapter concerns the role of an induction tutor (or mentor) in facilitating reflection in, on, and for, practice (Eraut, 1994, Schon, 1983, see also the supplementary chapter on mentoring).

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The chapter is organized around two questions:

- What are the main characteristics of the induction period?
- What is the relationship between mentoring and reflection?

The Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers

Whilst this chapter takes an English system of induction as its case study, it is instructive to note that other areas of the UK, particularly Scotland and Northern Ireland, have often had arrangements that are distinctively and interestingly different.

For example, in Scotland the long-established General Teaching Council has led a strong commitment to professional induction and development for beginning teachers – see: <http://www.in2teaching.org.uk/Students/student-teacher-induction-scheme-fqs.aspx>. This 'In2Teaching' scheme is supported by HEIs, local authorities and schools. In Northern Ireland an integrated approach to initial teacher training, induction and the early years of professional development has been promoted. This draws on a common framework of core criteria and competences which is applied across each stage. Foci for the competences include professional values, professional development, personal development, communication and relationships, and synthesis and application. It is interesting to note how the same set of competences is considered at the three main stages, but different elements are emphasized at each stage. For example, a competence statement relating to 'knowledge about children's learning' is something which should be addressed during initial teacher education, whilst 'knowledge of the education system and its interrelatedness' is something which will be considered mostly during induction. The stated aim of Northern Ireland's approach to teacher education is:

To encourage beginning professionals to develop their critical, reflective practice in order to improve their teaching and the quality of pupils' learning.

This is interesting because of its explicit references to teacher education and critical, reflective practice. In England the notion of teacher education has almost universally been replaced by training.

Specific requirements tend to change over time, but the major challenges tend to recur.

1.1 Induction systems

Two key ideas have influenced policy development in this area. The first is that NQTs have an entitlement to effective support and monitoring, and to access to professional development opportunities. The second is that in order to ensure high standards of entry to the profession, NQTs should be assessed against national 'induction standards'.

Irrespective of the regulatory framework, there is often some tension between these two legitimate objectives.

The most important person in induction is clearly the NQT. There is a clearly defined expectation that induction activity should occur with NQTs, rather than being as something that is done to them (Bubb, 2003, 2002; Simco, 2003). This works particularly well when NQTs are willing to take responsibility for their own professional development, including devising targets, proposing actions and engaging in processes of self-assessment against these targets. This also creates an excellent potential context for reflection.

Other stakeholders also have important responsibilities within induction. For example, headteachers and governors have responsibilities to ensure that the employing school is able to provide a context for induction that enables systematic professional development to occur. In some parts of the UK, Local Authorities may still act as the bodies that decide whether an NQT has satisfied the requirements of the induction period, but in England this has been delegated to schools and consortia.

The induction tutor within each school has the most crucial influence on the success, or otherwise, of the induction year. This person will be responsible for acting as mentor to facilitate professional development activities, to observe the NQT and to take part in the assessment process. Carroll and Simco (2001) identify a number of very specific responsibilities associated with the role:

- The induction tutor should have an appropriate knowledge/skills base. This includes key skills such as observation, conducting professional development tutorials and detailed knowledge of formal requirements. It follows that although an induction tutor would almost always be a very experienced teacher, the skills of effective teaching are not the same as those of effective mentoring. A critical difference is that the mentoring role involves posing the right questions at the right time to facilitate professional development in a structured and systematic fashion.
- A second area of responsibility relates to assessment. Although it is the case that an induction tutor does not have sole responsibility for assessing the newly qualified teacher, they do have a very significant contribution to make. They will need to ensure that they understand the need for assessment to be valid, inclusive and evidence-based.
- The third major area of responsibility is related to entitlement. Here the induction tutor is responsible for ensuring that the newly qualified teacher has every opportunity to experience a professional development programme based on a rich diet of appropriate experiences and opportunities.

1.2 Key elements of the induction year

We can now consider six elements of the induction process – again using the example of requirements in England in the mid-noughties.

The career entry and development profile

A long running question has been the linkage between initial teacher training and induction. Indeed Evans (1978) reminds us that, as long ago as 1925, the Board of Education was grappling with this particular issue. Is it possible for individual professional development to be continuous in an explicit and defined way across the barrier which separates initial teacher training and induction? In 1999 the new regulatory framework suggested the use of a Career Entry Profile to contribute to a more seamless transition (Kempe and Nicholson, 2000). In England, the TDA introduced Career Entry and Development Profiles which identified three 'transition points'. Transition point 1 is towards the end of initial teacher training (ITT), point

2 is at the beginning of the induction, and point 3 is towards the end of induction. Personal strengths and weaknesses are reviewed and recorded at each stage, and the information is utilized to support professional development. This process tended to produce forms of reflective practice as new teachers took stock of their development.

The individual development plan

The process of completing the Career Entry and Development Profile enabled each NQT to identify a series of professional objectives, recorded at Transition Point Two, which were then used to frame action, success criteria and target dates for achievement. In essence this process amounted to the creation of an individual development plan which was used to structure a wide range of professional development activities – such as those suggested on this website. Also included here was observation of other teachers in the NQT's school and beyond, attendance at external courses, opportunities for professional conversations with subject leaders within the school and collaborative teaching with colleagues. The principle here was that the identification of specific professional objectives and focused action taken in relation to these objectives would lead to identifiable professional development. To support this whole process NQTs had an entitlement to 10 per cent release time.

Professional review meetings

Built into the induction year arrangements were six professional review meetings where a process of professional conversation took place to explore the extent to which objectives recorded at Transition Point Two had been met. The meeting then went on to frame new objectives or revise existing objectives based on the review. The aim of this process was to ensure that the whole induction year centred on identifiable and specific professional objectives and actions that lead to clear action and review. In a sense, these meetings can be seen as focusing the cycle of reflective development.

Observation of NQTs' teaching

Processes of observation and professional discussions that surround it are a particularly rich context for the realization of reflective practice during induction. Indeed, with a pre-determined focus and a structured post-observation discussion, the induction tutor has an excellent opportunity to act as a reflective trigger. Regulations may be very specific in regard to the amount of observation that is expected and the characteristics of the process of observation, but there is normally considerable scope for school-determined foci to be introduced.

Observations of others' teaching

The idea that observation of experienced colleagues should be included in early professional development has been a familiar part of initial teacher training and induction for some time. However, the Career Entry and Development Profile required the NQT to develop very clear and precise professional development targets and, from these, a range of different kinds of ensuing action. One such action may relate to the observation of other teachers. Because the professional objective is potentially precise, so too should be the focus of the observation.

The assessment of the induction period

In the English case under consideration, three assessment meetings were required in the induction period. Each meeting was normally attended by the NQT, the induction tutor and the headteacher.

- The first of the three meetings focused on whether the NQT had consistently met the requirements for the award of QTS (i.e. the national standards) and many induction tutors would collect and cite specific illustrative evidence. However, this assessment often had a much broader feel than that carried out at the end of initial teacher training.
- At the end of the second term there was to be an assessment against the induction standards, which progress from the QTS standards and are fewer in number.
- In the third term there was a summative assessment against all the requirements of the induction period.

Each assessment was recorded on a national pro-forma which invited comments in three key areas linked to the standards: planning, teaching and class management; monitoring, assessing, recording, reporting and accountability; and other professional requirements. A very small minority of NQTs failed to meet the requirements of the induction period and in these cases, subject to an appeals process, were not be allowed to continue in employment in state schools.

Having reviewed these six elements in respect of the English case, we can now relate them to broader underpinning principles of induction. The twin pillars of support/monitoring and assessment have been highlighted before, but in the wider sense there is an enhanced expectation that the whole experience of induction should be centred on professional development. On the Reflective Teaching website, the supplementary chapter on Mentoring considers a range of roles, strategies, skills and qualities and focuses on the role of the mentor in structuring arrangements, in providing support and in training. The emphasis there is on support, whilst as we saw above, the English case study of NQT induction also provided for quite tough assessment against professional standards. This is a perennial dilemma for teacher training, induction and, indeed, performance management generally.

In any event, however the dilemma between support for learning and quality assessment of performance is played out in the context within which you work, there is no doubt that the induction year will provide very rich opportunities for reflective practice – at least the kind of reflection which flows from the detailed consideration of professional targets and objectives. It is to this issue that we now turn.

1.3 Reflection during induction

In recent years, international recognition of the importance of teacher quality in the performance of national education systems has provided a strong context for the development of reflective activity.

In many countries, individual professional development has become systematized within cultures of mentoring and systems of performance management. Such cycles of focused professional development are, at least in theory, responsive to individual strengths and school priorities for development. A professional development leader is often identified in each school to take forward these processes, and one of the major attributes of this person is a range of mentoring skills and qualities. For example, the framework for Continuing Professional Development (DfEE, 2001a) had at its centre a priority for developing mentoring and reflective skills, particularly for subject leaders.

We want to encourage teachers, as reflective practitioners, to think about what they do well, to reflect on what they could share with colleagues, as well as identifying their own learning needs. (DfEE, 2001, para 22)

Of course, it is also the case that conceptions of 'reflection' change over the years.

McIntyre (1993) identified three levels of reflection.

- The technical level is concerned with 'the effective attainment of given goals' (1993, p. 44) and in this respect there is a focus on what might be labelled the basic performance competences of learning to teach.
- A second level of reflection by contrast is termed practical reflection and is about the relationship of classroom practice to underpinning values and beliefs.
- The third level of reflection, the critical or emancipatory level, involves a process of looking beyond practice to become actively aware of the role of institutional and societal forces on teaching.

In any event, the quality of reflective professional development will be very dependent on the relationship between individual NQTs and induction tutors, and on the understanding and skill that the induction tutor can offer. At best, he or she has a really exciting and constructive role in acting as a reflective trigger to the thinking and practice of the NQT.

Higher-education institutions can also play an important role in this, with links though to accredited programmes of continuing professional development. In this way, the infrastructure supporting early and continuous professional development can be made more coherent.

Mentoring as Reflection

We have argued that arrangements for NQT induction can provide a rich opportunity for the development of certain kinds of reflective practice, and we have drawn attention to the critically important role of the induction tutor as mentor.

We now explore the nature of this relationship between mentoring and reflection in a little more detail.

2.1 Mentoring and reflection

The relationship between mentoring and reflection is fundamentally important to the professional well-being of individual teachers. To summarise:

- *Reflection* is the process through which teachers become aware of the complexity of their work and are able to take actions which impact positively on this.
- *Mentoring* provides support, drawing on accumulated professional knowledge and experience, which can help teachers to reflect with purpose and focus.

Taken together then, reflection and mentoring help to inform and build a culture of professional learning.

This is a crucial synergy, which leads to the construction of a learning community in the school. These ideas were considered Chapter 3 of *Reflective Teaching in Schools* (4th edition) in relation to 'learning with colleagues' and also in the supplementary chapter on Mentoring in which we addressed the roles of the mentor as a 'model', 'trainer', 'critical friend' and 'assessor'. They are reinforced throughout this chapter in relation to the school as a whole.

Many argue that the processes involved in learning about teaching are fundamentally complex because classrooms themselves are complex and dynamic environments. Calderhead (1991, p. 53) suggests that 'learning to teach is different from other forms of learning in academic life' because the process involves being able to interpret and respond to complex classroom events with enormous rapidity. Some key characteristics of classroom environments were analysed by Doyle (1977, 1986). They are multidimensional in the sense that many events occur in the classroom at any one time. Indeed, each classroom is a crowded place in which many people with different preferences and abilities must use a restricted supply of resources to accomplish a broad range of social and personal objectives. Classrooms are also characterized by simultaneity where these events often occur at the same time and with multiple consequences. Further, classrooms are unpredictable, as it is not possible to state in advance whether or how a particular classroom activity will develop. Finally classrooms have a history in the sense that classroom participants will have an understanding of the current reality of that classroom based on all the experiences which have occurred previous to this.

The notion that classroom environments are complex and that professional learning within these environments is hence often problematic is underlined by the literature. The result is that professional learning can be slow. To get to grips with multidimensionality and simultaneity is immensely demanding. Calderhead and Shorrock concluded that 'learning to teach involves more than the mastery of a limited set of competences. It is a complex process. It is also a lengthy process, extending for most teachers well after their initial training' (1997, p. 194). Several years earlier, Desforges and Cockburn came to a similar conclusion suggesting that 'we have shown the job is more difficult than perhaps even teachers realise. We have demonstrated in detail how several constraining classroom forces operate in concert and how teachers' necessary management strategies exacerbate the problems of developing children's thinking' (1987, p. 155). Given this idea that classroom environments are complex and professional learning is slow, it is perhaps hardly surprising that in some countries induction is spread over several years. For example, in the US State of Connecticut, the State Board developed the BEST programme which provides a systematic approach to induction over a period of three years centred on the production of a professional development programme.

Learning to teach or developing existing understandings of teaching involves engaging in explicit ways with the dimensions of the fundamental complexity of classroom environments. Yet to do this is important if identifiable professional learning is to occur. In order to do this effectively we suggest that the mentoring role is critically important as it has the potential to provide the trigger for new professional behaviours.

2.2 Mentoring conversations

We have established that classrooms are complex social environments and that learning to teach in these environments is demanding. The knock-on effect is that, for many, the process of professional development will be slow and uneven. However, mentoring can provide really constructive support for professional learning.

Among the many possible forms of mentoring are the following:

- Mentoring conversations where one teacher facilitates a discussion with another asking key questions that lead to the development of practice.
- Role modelling of good teaching for another to observe and utilize.
- Collaborative teaching involving a mentor and another teacher, each with defined roles within a lesson.
- Observation of teaching by a mentor and the provision of written feedback.
- Assessment of teaching by a mentor in either formative or summative contexts.
- Informal professional and/or personal support.
- Facilitating individual development plans for other teachers.

Many of these were considered in the supplementary chapter on Mentoring, but here we wish to focus on 'mentoring conversations' in particular detail. This follows Edwards and Collison (1996) who argued that new thinking is the essence of professional development. This is hugely facilitated through professional conversations – and particularly those concerned with the critical review of practice. It is through the process of questioning and seeking explanations for classroom occurrences that new understandings form.

Sixsmith and Simco (1997) extended this idea of the significance of mentoring conversations and created a representation of how they may work in practice. As a basis for this, they used Rowland's (1987) social constructivist model which focuses on children's learning and the role of adult intervention. Sixsmith and Simco argue that there are many parallels between the Rowland model and processes of mentoring intervention.

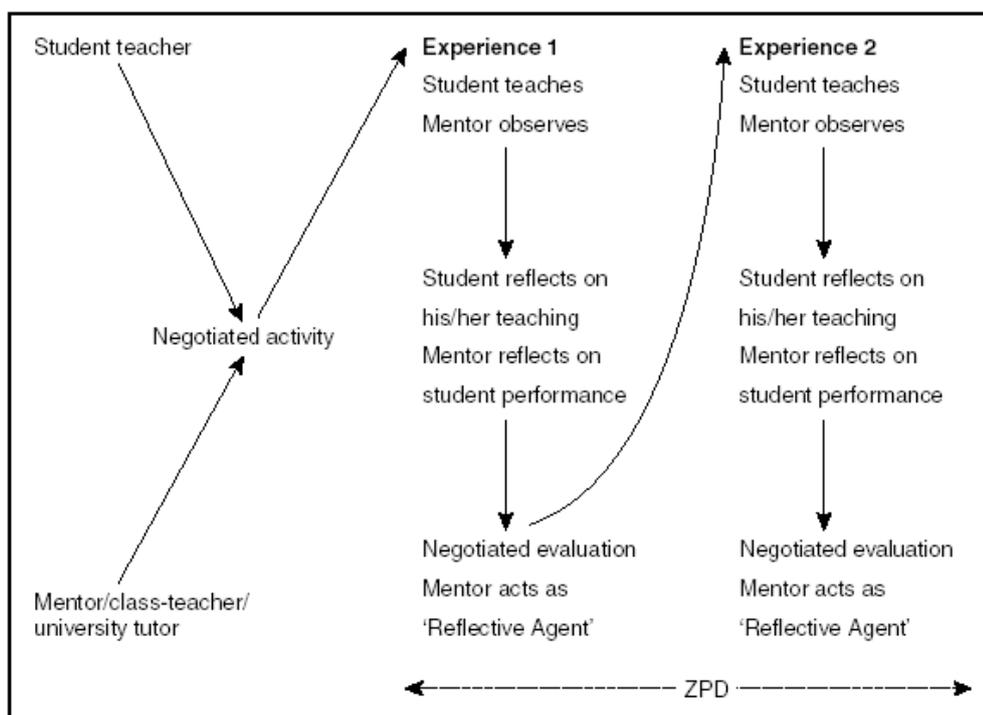


Figure 16.1 Professional development through reflective mentoring (Sixsmith and Simco, 1997)

This figure shows the role of mentor as reflective agent, intervening skilfully in a colleague's professional learning. In this model, the mentor and the teacher who is being mentored (the mentee) negotiate the nature of the activity to be taught. If the mentee had been an NQT in England in the noughties, you can imagine that this may be based on a professional objective which is recorded in the appropriate section of their Career Entry and Development Profile and this might have taken place before an observation. The students then engage with the experience that has been planned and the mentor acts as observer. Following the observation the mentor and the mentee both reflect in different ways, the mentor preparing a written critique of the observation, the mentee writing an evaluative statement. However, both mentor and mentee focus on clearly specified professional development objectives. There is then a meeting between the mentor and the mentee to evaluate the lesson. It is at this point that the mentor takes on the role of reflective agent, bringing the professional knowledge associated with the mentoring role to assist the mentee in making sense of the lesson which is being evaluated. A particularly important element here is the approach to questioning the mentor adopts. Some kinds of questions – 'Why did you . . .?', 'Are there any alternatives?', 'What was the consequence of your doing . . .?', 'What was the impact on children's learning?' – are particularly important during the course of this conversation.

Through this process, the mentor and the mentee also identify the potential learning for the latter. In this way, they effectively clarify the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – or the gap between what the learner knows already and what they could learn with further support. This whole process leads to the children being re-engaged with a modified task and then a further period of evaluation which identifies the extent to which the mentee has maximized their potential and crossed the ZPD into new learning.

The fundamental premise underpinning this model is that high-quality mentoring conversations make a vital contribution to professional learning. With skilful intervention on the part of the mentor, new professional learning can be generated which has an impact on practice.

In summary then, this section has shown how mentoring and reflection interact. First, the complexity of the classroom environment must be recognized. The next stage is for there to be an understanding of the potential of mentoring conversations to lead to professional development. The key to reflection within the mentoring process lies in the fine-grain detail of these conversations, in the skills of the mentor and the receptivity of the mentee.

Conclusion

This chapter has interwoven the themes of induction, mentoring, reflection and professional learning.

We suggested that, in a strong sense, a good induction system attempts to systematize professional reflection.

We have explored the detail of reflective conversations and discussed a model for these. However, we also suggested that it is important to balance pressures for short term performance with awareness of broader issues and educational understanding which will impact on quality and commitment over the long term. Reflection at the technical level is necessary but not sufficient. A focus on classroom objective setting and review may not extend to issues such as professional values, quality of pupil experiences, social consequences or educational innovation.

Key readings

A principled book on the transition to professional teaching is:

- Dillon, J. and Maguire, M. (eds) *Becoming a Teacher*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

There are several books and websites which provide professionally oriented support for NQTs and prospective NQTs. Drawing principles from the English case study used in this chapter, see:

- Bubb, S. (2007) *Successful Induction for New Teachers: A Guide for NQTS & Induction Tutors, Coordinators and Mentors*. London: Paul Chapman
- Simco, N. (2003) *Succeeding in the Induction Year*. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Other texts have been prepared to offer induction tutors support in their work with NQTs. Both of the texts below offer clear practical advice on issues such as roles and responsibilities and, in addition, offer perspectives on policy initiatives within induction.

- Mortimore, P and Bubb, S. (2003) *The Effective Induction of Newly Qualified Primary Teachers*. London: David Fulton.
- Carroll, C. and Simco, N. (2001) *Succeeding as an Induction Tutor*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Hicks, C., McNary, S. J. and Glasgow, N. A. (2005) *What Successful Mentors Do: 81 Research-based Strategies for New Teacher Induction, Training and Support*. London: SAGE.

Other books focus more strongly on policy and theoretical considerations. The two books below are particularly useful if you wish to consider alternative models of induction and both challenge effectively some underpinning assumptions about induction.

- Bleach, K. (2001) *Inducting New Teachers*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.
- Tickle, L. (2000) *Teacher Induction: the Way Ahead*. London: Open University Press.

A range of professional development materials are regularly produced by government agencies and by professional associations. For example, the National Education Union offers an excellent guide to induction, outlining rights, responsibilities and expectations – see: <https://neu.org.uk/advice-and-resources/trainee-advice/induction>