Using Policy to Improve Teacher Induction

Critical Elements and Missing Pieces

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To understand the relationship between induction policies, programs, and practices, we conducted case studies of three long-standing induction programs. Drawing on interviews, observations, and policy documents, we asked the following: (a) What policy tools operate in these contexts, and how do they effect local induction practices? (b) What can we learn about the relationship between induction policy and practice, including its influence on mentors and work? Our analysis finds that how the problem of induction is defined shapes the nature and duration of support offered and the programmatic tools and resources provided. Our analysis further shows that mentoring emerged the favored policy instrument, although provisions for mentor training varied considerably. To support the kind of teaching demanded by today’s reforms, beginning teachers will need mentors who are skilled in helping them learn in and from practice. Consequently, induction policy will need to focus attention equally on new teachers and their mentors.

Keywords: teacher quality; teacher retention and turnover; policy implementation

As researchers and teacher educators, our professional careers have been devoted to understanding and promoting practices that support teacher learning. So as policy makers’ attention gradually shifted toward the needs of new teachers through the 1990s, fueled by state-level efforts to improve teacher quality, we observed with interest the subtle yet critical interplay

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between the formal induction programs that emerged, the diverse mentoring practices that both evolved from and shaped programmatic efforts, and the policies that guided each. Inspired by others who had looked similarly at the intersection of education policy and classroom practice (Coburn, 2001; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane & Thompson, 1997), we sought to understand the relationship among induction programs, policies, and practices, including the various ways they inform and shape one another in the context of new teacher support.

As the 20th century drew to a close, before the ground-breaking legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), we used the recommendations of national experts, supported by existing literature and confirmed through early field visits, to select three induction programs for in-depth study. Importantly, these programs differed significantly in the design and delivery of support services, thereby offering us the opportunity to first identity, then to compare and contrast critical features of induction-related policy. For the larger study, of which this analysis is part, we spent 2 years learning from these programs by regularly interviewing program directors and school principals; observing, videotaping and interviewing new teachers and their mentors twice yearly, plus collecting key artifacts of their work together; and collecting a range of print documents describing program goals, expectations, and procedures.

In this article, we look back on these data to identify the primary induction-related policy instruments used by the programs and to explore how policy supported or constrained induction-related programming and practice in and across the sites, with a particular focus on the relationship between induction policy and mentors’ work. What is important is that this article neither draws on retention data or student achievement outcomes to support its argument nor makes any attempts to claim one program as better than another. Rather, through the example of these three quite different programs, our goal is to offer a new look at education policy in the context of new teacher induction.

Ultimately, our cross-case analysis demonstrates the important role induction policy played in defining the problem of beginning teaching in all three sites, which shaped the nature and duration of support received, as well as the programmatic tools and resources provided. Furthermore, our analysis found that mentoring was clearly the favored policy instrument in new teacher induction across these programs, thereby placing mentors in the critical position of carrying induction policy to the novice. Yet the degree to which mentors were supported as learners adopting a new practice—one that
included conveying the goals of an induction program—differed in important ways across these programs. To support the kind of teaching demanded by today’s accountability reforms, beginning teachers will need mentors who understand school and district priorities and who are skilled at helping them learn in and from practice. To meet this need, induction policy needs to focus its attention equally on new teachers and their mentors.1

We begin this article with an examination of policy initiatives in the area of teacher quality and induction and their connection to teacher development. We then introduce our sites, research questions, and methods. After comparing and contrasting induction-related policy instruments within and across each site, we continue with an expanded discussion of our findings in light of mentors’ role, working conditions, and opportunities to learn. In conclusion, we offer implications for induction policy that draw from the policy implementation literature.

As recent policy implementation literature demonstrates, policy actors interpret the meaning of policy in ways that may or may not follow policy maker’s intent (Coburn, 2001; Youngs, 2007). Similarly, policy can set conditions that in turn shape the understandings held by policy actors. This is particularly true in the existing new teacher support context. As long as mentoring remains the favored policy instrument in induction, mentors will be responsible for carrying induction policy to their new teachers. In the case of induction policy, how the problem of beginning teaching is defined and what attention is given to mentor development through policies regarding mentor selection and training are foundational to the kinds of support the novice is likely to experience.

### Teacher Quality and Beginning Teacher Induction

Since the mid 1980s, states across the country have exercised more central authority for educational improvement, a trend that accelerated with passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and its emphasis on ensuring “highly qualified” teachers for our nation’s schools. Evidence of this focus on teacher quality can be found in a range of new or improved state-level policies focused on teacher recruitment, preparation, licensure, and retention (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999). There is good reason for this emphasis. Districts and states that have made long-term investments in comprehensive and purposeful policies that support teacher preparation, licensing and professional development have historically posted strong student achievement gains (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 1999).
Within this broad category are policies directed specifically at new teachers, often through formal induction and mentoring programs, but also including tiered credentialing systems where some form of mentored support is a required component before a professional license is granted (Bartlett, Johnson, Lopez, Sugarman, & Wilson, 2005). This targeted focus aims to help keep new teachers in teaching, enable them to become more effective, hold them accountable for meeting professional standards and promoting student learning, and reduce hiring costs (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Fletcher, Strong & Villar, 2005; Huling-Austin, 1990).

The statistics driving induction policy and programming are compelling. It is widely reported that anywhere from 30% to 50% of teachers leave the profession within 5 years, with attrition highest in high-poverty settings (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). Clearly, an unacceptably large proportion of our teaching force is leaving just as they are gaining their stride in the classroom and developing the qualities attributed to master teachers (Berliner, 2000). However, students are not the only ones who bear the cost of teachers leaving. It is conservatively estimated that each teacher leaving a school adds roughly $12,000 in rehiring expenses (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004); whereas the per-teacher cost of a comprehensive induction program is half that amount (Moir, 2003). As others have argued, the dollars recovered from high rates of attrition could easily support mentor training programs and release time for new teachers—induction practices that so many districts find too costly to fund.

At the same time, induction statistics show evidence that policy makers are paying attention to the problem of unsupported beginning teaching. In an examination of the 2000 Schools and Staffing Survey data, Smith & Ingersoll (2004) found that as many as 80% of beginning teachers report participating in some form of induction support, up from 40% in the early 1990s. And as of 2003, 28 states had legislation mandating induction support (Editorial Projects in Education, 2004), and many districts, especially in urban centers, offer some degree of programming for beginning teachers (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Still, the situation is uneven. Most induction policies are underfunded, as illustrated by the fact that only 16 of 28 states actually help to finance their induction mandates (Editorial Projects in Education, 2004). This leaves districts with the onus of deciding if induction matters enough to pay for it, and if the answer is yes, how to creatively finance induction-related programming (i.e., mentor compensation, training, and release time) on already lean budgets.
Equally important, many programs remain underconceptualized, resting on narrow views of what it takes to support teachers and develop their teaching through the early professional years (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999). A comprehensive and effective approach to induction must offer more than help finding paper for the copy machine. Even those who come through a strong teacher preparation program need to learn about the students they will teach, design an instructional program that is responsive to those students, enact a beginning teaching repertoire, and develop a professional identity during their early professional years (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003). For those who come to teaching through alternative routes, the added importance of having ongoing mentored support for learning to teach is hard to ignore.

This state of affairs is sufficient cause for concern. Prescriptions about induction and mentoring abound, but research on the character, quality, and effects of induction programs and policies remains limited. Historically, researchers have focused attention on the effects of induction with a focus on mentoring practices and structures, many through case studies (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003; Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). More recently, we have seen researchers broaden their view and methodological approaches to examine retention rates among novice teachers, including their experience with different kinds of induction support (Ingersoll, 2001; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004); to analyze the effects of mentored support on student achievement (Fletcher et al., 2005); and to focus attention on new teachers experience in varied school settings (Johnson, 2004).

Additionally, a series of recent studies examine the ways state and district policy shape new teachers experience and their subsequent learning opportunities (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman, 2004; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Youngs, 2007). This literature reinforces the importance of strong school cultures and organizational conditions that support beginning teacher learning. By offering insight into the ways induction policy, programming, and practice interact, from the macro level where policy originates to the local level where policy is enacted, our analysis contributes to this body of literature.

To mount effective induction programs on a larger scale, we will need to better understand the ways induction policy fosters or inhibits quality induction practice. The next section of the article introduces our study and the programs selected, which is followed by a summary of the key policy instruments used in each site.
Learning from Three Well-Regarded Programs: BEST, BTSA and PAEP

To better understand the induction policy landscape at the time, we sought to identify a small cohort of well-regarded induction programs located in states and/or districts with robust induction policies. Drawing primarily on on-site interviews and observations with a select group of new teachers, their mentors and principals over a 2-year period, our intent was to conduct descriptive case studies that would highlight the policies and practices central to each program (Merriam, 1998). To identify these sites, we solicited recommendations from experts in the field, looked for peer acknowledgement in the professional literature, and conducted site visits. In the end, we settled on three programs: two at the state level and one at the district level.

At the time of the study, each had supported formal induction programming for more than a decade despite changes in administration and shifting resources. Furthermore, each figured prominently in the early induction literature as examples of exemplary programs (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF], 1996). Equally important, however, these programs differed significantly in terms of program length, mentor selection and training, and the use of assessment to promote novice development. These differences were intriguing, as we wondered what impact they might have on new teacher learning opportunities. It is these distinguishing features of induction policy that are the focus of this conceptually oriented analysis. Briefly, our cases included the following programs.

Connecticut’s Beginning Educator Support and Training Program (BEST). This program provides 1 year of mentored support to all new teachers in the state and culminates with the development of a standards-based professional portfolio at the end of the 2nd year of teaching, which is linked to state licensure. Our study looked at the implementation of BEST in New Haven, Connecticut at a time when the portfolio requirement was still relatively new.

California’s Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA). This program is a statewide effort to provide mentored support informed by standards-based formative assessment during a novice’s first 2 years of teaching. We looked specifically at the implementation of BTSA in the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP), a regional partnership between the University of California at Santa Cruz, the county office of education and
local school districts. As one of the original pilot sites, the SCNTP had distinguished itself as a leader among BTSA programs across the state.

*Cincinnati’s Peer Assistant and Evaluation Program (PAEP).* This program represents one of the first union-led peer review programs in the country. Although never designed exclusively as an induction program, PAEP offers an interesting alternative model for new teacher induction featuring 1 year of standards-based mentor support combined with rigorous ongoing assessment. Notably, data collection occurred while the district was deeply engaged in school-based reform efforts.

Our research focused mainly on the local context of implementation where induction policy is enacted. We wanted to know what it was like to be a mentor teacher and a beginning teacher in districts and states that, by reputation, took induction seriously. In short, we were interested in the curriculum and pedagogy of induction in each site and the effects on a small sample of new teachers served by each of the programs. At the same time, we wanted to understand how variations in induction policy affected the character and quality of induction programs and practices. This interest in multiple contexts led us to an embedded case design where we could examine policy through state, district, and local lens (Yin, 1994).

Although we do not assume that educational policy guarantees quality programming, we wanted to understand how state and district policies might set conditions and exert a constructive influence on the local design and support of high-quality induction activity. Two questions framed the analysis reported in this article: (a) What policy tools or instruments operate in these different contexts and how do they effect local induction activities, particularly with respect to mentors’ work? (b) What can we learn about the relationship between policy and practice from these cases of new teacher induction, including the ways induction policy shapes and guides the work of mentors? To inform our analysis, we drew from the literature on policy implementation, especially that which looks at the connections between policy and classroom practice, or in this case, between induction policy, mentors, and the new teachers they work with.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

This article draws on data collected from 1999-2001, prior to the policy changes now associated with No Child Left Behind legislation. Two sets of data were collected: data that illuminated the nature and quality of programming offered new teachers, including the quality of mentoring provided, and...
data that uncovered beginning teachers experience in the program. Program data, largely collected in the 1st year of the study, consisted of semistructured interviews with program directors, select mentors, and new teachers, as well as job shadowing and follow-up interviews with mentor teachers in each site. Project researchers also observed key program components, including mentor training and new teacher seminars, and collected relevant print documents. More than 70 hours of interview and observation data were collected in each site for this phase of the study.

In addition to examining the induction programs in a variety of policy contexts, we drew on the program data to identify a cohort of six beginning teachers in each site. Data on new teachers consisted of biannual observations of classroom teaching and mentoring interactions with associated interviews across the 2 years, plus interviews at the beginning and end of each year. For each new teacher in our study, we collected a minimum of 20 hours of observation and interview data, with considerably more for some individuals in our sample. The analysis reported here draws on the complete data set.

For each observation and interview, detailed field notes were written, artifacts collected, and interviews recorded for later transcription. Following each site visit, we wrote analytic memos for each participant group (e.g., program administrators, beginning teachers, mentors, principals), which were shared with the full research team to identify emerging patterns within and across sites (Miles & Huberman, 1997). From the program data, we constructed case studies for each site organized around our main research questions (Feiman-Nemser, 2000). We also analyzed the quality of mentoring and its effects on a sample of beginning teachers, as well as their perceptions about the different sources of influence on their ideas and practice. Complementary analyses examined the efforts of mentors and building administrators to enact new teacher support (Carver, 2002; Feiman-Nemser & Schwille, 2004; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, in press). In this article, we examine our sites through a policy lens, beginning with an overview of the state and district induction policies in place for each of our sites.

Key Instruments of State and District Induction Policy

In this section, we return to our first research question: What policy tools operate in these different contexts, and how do they affect local induction activities? To answer this question, we begin with an historical overview of each program, followed by the identification of key policy instruments and their features. Our aim is to fully capture the vision for induction that
characterizes each site; therefore, our descriptions are purposefully detailed to contextualize the subsequent analyses. We then look across program policies for similarities and differences.5

Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST)

A leader in the development of statewide support systems for new teachers, Connecticut made a commitment to raising standards for teacher education and licensure in 1986 with passage of the Education Enhancement Act (Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2000). A key component of this comprehensive reform package was BEST, a 2-year induction program that combined 1st-year mentoring with 2nd-year performance-based assessment as the basis, along with a master’s degree, for a continuing professional license (Connecticut State Department of Education [CSDE], 1999a).

As directed by legislation, the induction of new teachers in Connecticut was considered a shared responsibility between the state and local districts. Although school districts were encouraged to supplement the state program, they were minimally required to provide a BEST–trained mentor for each 1st-year teacher. The BEST mentors were expected to help new teachers strengthen their knowledge of subject matter, students, and instructional strategies and their understanding of school, district and state standards and to lay a foundation for continuing professional development. At the time of data collection, districts received $200 per beginning teacher to support BEST implementation at the local level. Funds were to be used for mentor stipends, teacher release time, professional development activities, and the purchase of instructional materials.6

Two state-developed standards documents, the Common Core of Teaching (CCT; CSDE, 1999b)7 and the Common Core of Learning (CCL), were designed to provide an overarching framework for the BEST program. The CCT emphasized teachers’ commitment to providing high-quality instruction, creating effective learning environments and continuing their professional growth across the career cycle. It was regarded as the primary tool for influencing teacher preparation, induction, and continued professional development in the state (CSDE, 1999b). Alongside the CCT was the CCL. The CCL was designed to work hand-in-hand with state curriculum frameworks to identify curricular goals for all grade levels in all subject areas. The CCT aligned with these standards by defining teaching that would support the kind of learning reflected in the CCL.

By the end of their 2nd-year, beginning teachers were to submit completed portfolios to the state for assessment. Portfolio requirements asked 2nd-year
teachers to select a unit of instruction around an essential concept in their subject area, engage students in an exploration of that concept over several lessons, assess and reflect on students’ learning, and reflect on their own teaching. These portfolios, assessed by state-trained assessors using rubrics based on the CCT and CCL, were expected to include daily lesson plans, samples of student work, videotaped teaching segments and written commentary on their planning, instruction and student learning (CSDE, 1999c).

Because of the high-stakes nature of this requirement, novices often consulted informally with their mentors through their 2nd year for additional guidance in assembling portfolios.

In an effort to bring state policy to local districts, the state housed BEST trainers and consultants in regional centers where they offered the required CCT clinics, subject-specific seminars, and portfolio workshops. The state provided these personnel with training manuals that contained scripted lessons. The use of standardized training materials was intended to insure consistency and accountability across districts.

Over the years, Connecticut developed and refined a set of coherent state-level induction policies for supporting and assessing new teachers through their first 2 years on the job (Youngs, 2007). Key induction-related policy instruments included standards frameworks, a year of mentoring, various workshops and seminars for the beginning teacher, and portfolio assessment at the end of the 2nd year of teaching linked to licensure. From this set of policies, we see an understanding of induction as part of an ongoing learning process that begins in teacher preparation and continues on the job. During the induction stage, new teachers benefit from the ongoing assistance of a district mentor who assumes no formal responsibility for assessment, combined with the more formal subject-specific professional development offered by the state in preparation for full licensure.

Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA)

Like Connecticut, California was an early leader in making new teacher induction the focus of policies targeted toward improved teaching and learning (Olebe, 2001). The BTSA was a prime example. Other efforts included the California Mentor Teacher Program, later replaced by the Peer Assistance and Review Program, and ongoing efforts to establish an accountability system based on standards for both student academic achievement and teacher performance. Today, in the midst of a statewide budget crisis, BTSA has maintained steady funding levels, whereas other programs have been cut. It is estimated that BTSA now serves 20,000 to 24,000 beginning teachers annually (Esch, Chang-Ross, Tiffany-Morales, & Shields, 2004).
The California New Teacher Program was created in the late 1980s to study alternative models for supporting and assessing 1st- and 2nd-year teachers. Its larger mission was to inform future policy around a comprehensive statewide strategy for the certification and professional induction of beginning teachers. Early success led to the creation of the BTSA in 1992, when competitive grants were awarded to thirty locally designed and administered programs who viewed teaching as a “complex, challenging profession that requires reflective, collegial practices that develop over time while new teachers gain expertise and confidence as professional decision-makers” (Bartell & Ownby, 1994, p. 8).

From the beginning, emphasis was placed on developing a standards-based program to complement the teacher credentialing system. Toward that end, the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) were adopted in 1997 to facilitate the induction of beginning teachers into their professional roles and responsibilities by providing a common language and a new vision of the scope and complexity of teaching (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and California Department of Education, 1997). Shortly thereafter, BTSA Program Standards were developed to help local officials design, implement, and evaluate well-designed and cost-efficient induction programs that included “formative assessment, individual support, advanced study and frequent reflection on the practice of teaching” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and California Department of Education, 1997, p. 3).

Several years later, in accordance with continuing BTSA legislation, the state created a performance-based assessment system, aligned with the California teaching standards, to guide the formative assessment of new teachers. The California Formative Assessment and Support System (CFASST) soon became a required component of all BTSA programs, unless a suitable alternative was approved by the state.

In its report to the legislature at the end of 1997, the BTSA legislative advisory panel outlined four comprehensive goals for the statewide restructuring of teacher preparation, induction, and continued professional development (California Commission on Teaching Credentialing, 1998). These goals reflected the continuing refinement of a vision for the systemic certification and induction of novice teachers. They included improving teacher recruitment, selection, and access; establishing clear content and teaching standards; increasing professional accountability through rigorous assessment; and changing the teacher certification process.

In response to the fourth goal, a two-tiered credentialing system was drafted, which required teacher candidates to earn a baccalaureate degree, demonstrate competence in subject matter knowledge and basic skills, and
complete an approved professional preparation program before receiving a preliminary certificate. At the time our study ended, new teachers were required to participate in an induction program, be formally assessed (typically by their building principal), and develop an individual growth plan for which 150 hours of professional development had to be completed before a “clear” or professional credential would be granted.

As this summary highlights, California endorsed a comprehensive set of tightly connected policies to support and develop new teachers through their first 2 years of teaching, including mentored support guided by formative assessment for new teachers through their 2nd year of teaching. Notably, in 2000 and 2001, local BTSA projects received $3,200 in state funds per new teacher. In addition, BTSA programs received technical assistance and training from the state around a set of program standards, which were also used as the basis for program accreditation. Furthermore, a set of teaching standards served as a framework for the formative assessment process.

Together, these features of induction policy reflect a view of induction as a developmental process requiring individualized support and assistance over time, as informed by ongoing formative assessment directed toward teaching standards. Furthermore, because the state gave full responsibility for program development to grassroots partnerships, local sites were empowered to create programs responsive to the needs of new teachers and mentors.

**Cincinnati’s Peer Assistance and Evaluation Program (PAEP)**

The PAEP was established in 1985 to assist and evaluate beginning teachers, and to assist experienced teachers with serious instructional concerns. Motivated by the criticism of America’s schools in the early 1980s, as well as the American Federation of Teacher’s call for greater teacher professionalism and involvement in policy-oriented decisions, key union and school representatives joined together in establishing PAEP. This agreement stipulated that all new teachers or interns would be assisted and evaluated by a PAEP consulting teacher or “CT” and must receive a satisfactory evaluation within 2 years (Cincinnati Public Schools, 1998).

In a parallel move, Cincinnati teachers successfully bargained for the Career in Teaching Program in 1988, establishing a teaching ladder that grouped teachers into intern, resident, career and lead teacher categories, with the understanding that consulting teachers must also be lead teachers. To earn lead teacher credentials, a teacher was required to go through a rigorous process involving a written application, teaching observations and interview. Notably, new teachers were recognized as an essential part of the career ladder (Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2001).
A 10-member panel, composed equally of union-appointed teachers and board-appointed administrators, met regularly to provide program oversight to PAEP. This group assumed responsibility for recruiting and selecting consulting teachers, reviewing and developing program policies, as well as overseeing the work of consulting teachers. To illustrate, once a month, consulting teachers were expected to furnish copies of all written documents used in their work with teachers. The panel then divided into pairs of teachers and administrators to meet with small groups of consulting teachers to discuss each teacher on the consulting teachers’ caseload. Notably, at the end of the year, the panel heard the recommendations of the consulting teachers and made the final decision about renewing or not renewing teachers’ contracts.

As an induction program, one of PAEP’s most distinguishing features was its commitment to coupling on-site assistance with high-stakes assessment. Like the other programs studied, PAEP relied primarily on mentor relationships between experienced teachers and beginning teachers. Consulting teachers were released full time from their classroom teaching duties to assist and assess as many as 14 teachers. These consulting teachers had direct responsibility for most of the major components and functions of the PAEP, including facilitation of biweekly seminars, plus the observation, assistance, and evaluation of new teachers.

Guiding the work of consulting teachers were a set of district standards for student learning. Called *Promotion Standards* (Cincinnati Public Schools, n.d.) at the elementary and *Credit-Granting Standards* at the secondary, these documents provided detailed guidance about what to teach, what kind of student work to collect, and how to assess this work, as well as the various proficiency levels for each standard. Broadly speaking, the *Promotion* and *Credit-Granting Standards* were designed to ensure that teachers across the district knew what content and processes they were responsible for at each grade level or subject area. Observations and interviews with both new and consulting teachers underscored the importance these standards played in their work.

In Cincinnati, standards-based mentoring combined with high-stakes summative evaluation was the primary policy instrument for new teacher induction. Although the stakes were high for new teachers, provision for due process reduced the likelihood of unfair treatment. Standards also served as a policy tool, providing a useful frame for structuring the delivery of induction programming to new teachers. These policy strategies reinforced a view of induction as a means for orienting new teachers to the district, helping them teach to district standards and holding them accountable for competent practice.
### Table 1

**Preferred Instruments of State and District Induction Policy**

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<th>Connecticut BEST</th>
<th>California BTSA Program</th>
<th>Cincinnati PAEP</th>
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<td><strong>Key policy instruments</strong></td>
<td>Mentoring for all Year 1 new teachers. Performance portfolio prior to professional licensure in Year 2. Combination of state-sponsored seminars and district-sponsored mentoring.</td>
<td>Mentored support guided by formative assessment through Year 2 for all new teachers. Successful participation in induction program required for clear credential. Local partnerships responsible for program administration.</td>
<td>Ongoing evaluation plus assistance by consulting teacher through Year 1 for all new teachers. Successful evaluation required for continuing district contract. Program administered jointly by central office and union representatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key policy provisions</strong></td>
<td>State contributes $200 per new teacher to local districts for program implementation. Mandates 2 days of state-sponsored mentor training. New teachers guided by state standards (e.g., CCT and CCL). State-sponsored seminars offered to assist teachers as they prepare performance portfolios. Portfolios scored by state-trained assessors.</td>
<td>State contributes $3,200 per new teacher for local implementation. Requires local partnerships with county office &amp; IHE’s. Mandates 3 days of state-approved mentor training. New teachers guided by state teaching standards (e.g., CSTP). Programs guided by the BTSA program standards. Formative assessment guided by CFASST.</td>
<td>CTs full-time released from classroom 2 years. CTs must qualify for lead teacher status. New CTs trained in use of the evaluation process and district standards. Evaluation process guided by district content standards. CTs recommend rehiring of NTs. Panel provides administrative oversight to CT’s work.</td>
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Note: BEST = Beginning Educator Support and Training Program; BTSA = Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment; PAEP = Peer Assistant and Evaluation Program; CCT = Common Core of Teaching; CCL = Common Core of Learning; CSTP = California Standards for the Teaching Profession; CFASST = California Formative Assessment and Support System.
Comparing and Contrasting Policy Instruments

As these descriptions demonstrate, induction policy varied across programs, establishing a context-specific set of conditions that shaped the local practice of new teacher support. Table 1 summarizes the key induction-related policy tools used by each program. As an analytic strategy for comparing the role of induction policy across our sites, we posed three questions: How does induction policy define the problem of beginning teaching? What parameters or boundaries does the policy set with respect to program length and mentor roles? Finally, what supporting tools or resources does the policy provide to enable effective local practices?

Defining the “Problem” of Beginning Teaching

Policy has been described as a purposeful response to an identified problem. With this in mind, we sought to determine how each program defined the problem of beginning teaching. Did novices have a lot to learn, or was induction simply a transitional bridge helping novices “learn the ropes” and fit into their new context? Furthermore, what implications for the content of new teacher learning (e.g., subject matter, pedagogical skills, classroom management, local norms) could we see in the policy?

Notably, all three sites defined the problem of new teacher support similarly. For example, all three stipulated that beginning teachers new to the site, regardless of subject area or experience, be included in formal induction. This suggests that policy leaders recognized the unique character of the 1st year(s) of teaching and the need for all beginning teachers to have some on-site support and guidance. Furthermore, both Connecticut and California induction policies mandated a 2-year process, which reflected awareness that learning to teach takes an extended amount of time.8

Similarly, each program explicitly acknowledged that induction is part of a larger teacher learning process that begins in initial preparation and continues through professional development. This focus recognizes that new teachers have things to learn, which they could not have learned beforehand, and that regular and ongoing feedback around teaching and/or content standards will help guide this learning in fruitful directions. This nod to novice teacher learning looked somewhat different in each site, however. In Connecticut, we inferred from policy documents that beginning teachers needed help in becoming reflective practitioners. Consistent with this belief, professional licensure required the demonstration of reflective practice through a professional portfolio that included records of practice (e.g., analyses
of student work), examples of instructional planning, and videotapes of teaching. Furthermore, reflection on these various artifacts was informed by content-specific standards and assessments.

In California, induction policy communicated a similar message. As stated in the BTSA program literature, induction was to provide beginning teachers with the support needed to develop standards-based practice. Toward this end, a coherent set of formative assessment tools, embedded in new teacher’s ongoing work, was designed to keep mentors and beginning teachers moving toward this goal. Importantly, this formative assessment system was guided by a set of teaching standards, applicable to all grade-level and content areas.

In contrast with the two state-level programs, induction policy in Cincinnati reflected a belief that beginning teachers needed assistance to teach well in a unique district context and that veteran teachers were in the best position to provide this district-specific assistance. For example, in completing their classroom write ups, CTs (i.e., mentors) reinforced system-wide expectations by frequently referring back to district standards, policies, and procedures.

As this discussion highlights, although policy instruments varied across programs, all three sites addressed the problem of beginning teaching in similar ways: all new teachers were included; induction support was provided for at least one full year; and this support was fundamentally connected to the classroom. Moreover, we see evidence that all three programs recognized beginning teaching as a time of learning through their sustained use of teaching and learning standards to help the novice build content knowledge and develop pedagogical skills in the context of their own classroom. This observation is significant, as we find the induction literature is more heavily weighted toward an agenda focused on recruitment and retention than one focused on learning needs.

**Establishing Policy Boundaries**

Next, we examined the length of time accorded to new teacher learning and development in each program, as well as the mentoring provisions made for that learning. We were also interested in how induction policy addressed issues of accountability through assessment practices. Collectively, we refer to these as policy boundaries, as they reflect the parameters regarding new teacher development that policy makers assign to induction and what aspects they allocate to related teacher quality activities (e.g., teacher evaluation and licensure).
We found subtle variation among programs in terms of how long new teachers should receive induction services and, more importantly, what those services should entail. Although all three programs had the potential to extend support through a beginning teacher’s 2nd year, only California guaranteed (and paid for) two full years of ongoing mentored support for all new teachers. Connecticut’s BEST program provided a blended model that combined 1 year of district-provided mentoring, with a 2nd year of state-sponsored workshops designed to help novices complete their performance-based portfolio. Although BEST mentors could continue to work with new teachers through this 2nd year, our observation confirmed that it was largely an informal and episodic experience for the new teachers in our site, largely dependent on the goodwill of the mentor.\(^9\) In contrast with the other two sites, Cincinnati’s PAEP contract limited new teacher support to 1 year of assistance, unless more time was needed to prove professional competence. In this case, after recommendation by the consulting teacher and approval by the 10-member oversight panel, a 2nd-year of assistance could be, and occasionally was, offered.

We also examined induction policy according to how roles were assigned relative to the functions of new teacher assistance and assessment. In Connecticut, the combination of assistance and assessment occurred at three different levels: mentors provided in-classroom assistance; building principals conducted separate district-level teacher evaluations; and state assessors assumed responsibility for licensure portfolios. California induction policy supported a traditional two-person model, separating mentored assistance from principal evaluation. In fact, although BTSA mentors were encouraged to use formative assessment techniques with beginning teachers, BTSA program standards prohibited mentors from engaging in summative evaluation.

In sharp contrast, we saw the combination of summative assessment coupled with mentored assistance in Cincinnati where consulting teachers assumed the dual role of mentor and evaluator. Like other peer review programs, PAEP principals had no formal responsibility for teacher evaluation. Table 2 highlights the important role variations present in these three sites.

This brief discussion of policy boundaries surfaces the subtle ways in which induction policy helps determine the degree to which induction support is connected to related teacher quality policies, including evaluation, as well as the degree to which various stakeholders, including building principals, are given responsibility for new teacher support. Ultimately, we argue that induction policy can influence whether or not induction programming is integrally connected to the ongoing work of an educational system or whether it is operating more-or-less autonomously.
Finally, we viewed induction policy through the tools and resources they provided, as well as the priority they placed on each. Our assumption was that well-designed tools and resources would not only provide important policy guidance but also would strengthen the quality of support. Notably, standards played a key role in each of our sites. Broadly speaking, these documents articulated a view of good teaching that helped to guide new teacher assistance and assessment by site.

In Connecticut, the **CCT** and the **CCL** combined to provide instructional guidance for all teachers, new and experienced. Similarly, the district-based **Promotion** and **Credit-Granting Standards** specifically focused the work of consulting teachers in Cincinnati. In both cases, standards documents highlighted the content that was to be taught and the learning processes favored for teaching that content. In contrast, the **CSTP** combined with the BTSA Program Standards to shape the character and quality of new teacher support across the state by deliberately focusing on the development of high-quality teaching practices. Notably, content-specific standards do not figure as prominently in the California induction policy documents as they do in those from Connecticut or Cincinnati.

In all three sites, standards documents helped to establish a shared professional vocabulary among teachers, new and veteran. Furthermore, they collectively and consistently reinforced the importance of high-quality instruction by knowledgeable and skilled practitioners; instruction that

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**Table 2**

**Role Variations Among State and District Policies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Connecticut BEST</th>
<th>California BTSA Program</th>
<th>Cincinnati PAEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor or consulting teacher</td>
<td>Assistance only</td>
<td>Assistance coupled with formative assessment</td>
<td>Summative assessment coupled with assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Teacher evaluation for contract renewal</td>
<td>Teacher evaluation for contract renewal</td>
<td>No formal role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State assessor</td>
<td>Portfolio assessment for licensure</td>
<td>No formal role</td>
<td>No formal role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BEST = Beginning Educator Support and Training Program; BTSA = Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment; PAEP = Peer Assistant and Evaluation Program.

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**Providing Tools and Resources**

Finally, we viewed induction policy through the tools and resources they provided, as well as the priority they placed on each. Our assumption was that well-designed tools and resources would not only provide important policy guidance but also would strengthen the quality of support. Notably, standards played a key role in each of our sites. Broadly speaking, these documents articulated a view of good teaching that helped to guide new teacher assistance and assessment by site.

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In all three sites, standards documents helped to establish a shared professional vocabulary among teachers, new and veteran. Furthermore, they collectively and consistently reinforced the importance of high-quality instruction by knowledgeable and skilled practitioners; instruction that
reflected a deep understanding of content and the strategic use of instructional strategies in a vibrant classroom community. Finally, standards documents provided a concrete tool for helping novice teachers become acquainted with the unique perspectives on teaching and learning held by the program.

Yet another way of distinguishing among sites was by the allocation of financial resources. Clearly, both Connecticut and California had invested tremendous sums in developing a coherent set of statewide policies and tools that could be adapted for use at the local level. For a small state such as Connecticut, this represented a sizeable investment in program development, although one might also argue that implementation was also easier in a smaller system.

Furthermore, both states had dedicated funds to local induction support, although the amounts provided differed significantly, from California’s $3,200 per new teacher to Connecticut’s $200 per new teacher. As a result, school districts such as New Haven were left each year with having to make choices about what induction-related practices they most needed and could afford. Districts in California, on the other hand, could concentrate on growing and developing their local induction-related resources. In our two cases, the difference was most noticeable in mentors’ work. In the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, mentors were released full time from their classroom to work with 10 to 15 beginning teachers across the year. In New Haven, with considerably less financial support from the state, mentors were largely expected to find time for mentoring before and after school.

As these two state-based cases demonstrate, when states provide funds in support of local efforts (e.g., mentoring) they increase the likelihood of fidelity to state goals. As an alternative model, Cincinnati’s PAEP program is both neatly woven into district programming and protected by a joint district or union agreement. As a result, everyone—teachers, building principals and central administration—are bound and committed to program success.¹⁰

Emergent Cross-Case Issues

What can we learn about the nature of induction policy from these cases? Several key issues emerge from this comparative analysis, each with implications for policy makers. First, policy is often described as a response to a real or perceived problem. In the case of new teacher induction, the problem is often defined in rather simplistic terms as one of recruitment and retention. Programs with this narrow view frequently limit induction support to the 1st year of teaching. Our analysis reminds us that the induction phase is a
time of extended learning, often through the 2nd and even 3rd years of teaching. Equally important, thoughtfully crafted induction policy can further guide the nature and direction of that learning over time.

To illustrate, whether policy stipulates assistance with formative assessment (as in California), summative assessment (as in Cincinnati) or a combination of the two (as in Connecticut), sets conditions for how induction support is practiced by mentors, and experienced by novices. These cases also highlight the need to carefully consider the value and limits of a strict separation between assistance and assessment, as explicit attention to multiple and ongoing forms of assessment promote learning in ways that are hard to overlook. We saw this most clearly in Cincinnati, where the coupling of summative assessment with assistance led to built-in accountability for growth according to an established standard.

Similarly, when layered onto beliefs about what new teachers need to learn, policy boundaries regarding program length and mentor role help to determine whether induction is a high- or low-stakes endeavor. In California, BTSA mentors were prohibited from engaging in summative assessment and there were no formal links between induction support and district tenure or state licensure. As a result, induction was a low-stakes event, isolated from related teacher quality measures. The goal was to move novices toward standards-based teaching; however, there was no formal mechanism built into the policy for guaranteeing that they met a designated threshold (Carver & Katz, 2004).

The opposite was true in Cincinnati where new teacher support and evaluation were fundamentally connected. Failure to perform at reasonable levels of competence—all within one year—would result in termination from the district, unless all parties agreed to a 2nd-year evaluation. Similarly, to get a continuing professional license in Connecticut, new teachers must receive a favorable assessment on their 2nd-year portfolio, or reapply in their 3rd year. By linking induction policy to either district tenure or state licensure, Cincinnati and Connecticut raised the stakes significantly.

These cases further highlight the importance of carefully crafted tools and resources designed to support policy implementation. Because induction policies and programs represent a break from traditional “sink or swim” practice, programs particularly benefit from the policy guidance offered by standards documents. Our California case demonstrates that program standards help induction staff determine areas of priority, whereas teaching standards provide mentors with a basis for assessing novice progress and identifying areas for professional growth. Connecticut and Cincinnati extend this argument with their added emphasis on student content standards.
Together, these three sets of standards documents serve to guide program development and practice.

At the same time, policy makers need to be cautious when establishing policy via remote control. State-level policy makers and local induction leadership must be of common mind and understanding for the policy to work as intended. We saw this most clearly in Connecticut, where state policy was neatly aligned, and yet program coherence was easily compromised when mentors were full-time teachers, districts had competing priorities and needs, and local leaders did not integrate BEST with other opportunities for new teacher support and development.

In comparing and contrasting the primary instruments of state and district induction policy in three well-regarded induction programs, we have highlighted how various policy tools and instruments operate in different contexts. We have also illustrated how induction policy can set conditions that enable or constrain effective induction practices, specifically by how policy defines the problem of beginning teaching, sets policy boundaries, and provides policy-related tools and resources. At the same time, we cannot ignore the central role mentoring played in all three sites, both as a policy and as a practice. We now turn to that half of our argument.

**Mentors as Agents of Induction Policy**

As our analysis demonstrates, mentoring served as the dominant policy strategy across all three sites, placing mentor teachers in the role of policy brokers. Through their interactions with beginning teachers, mentors bring induction policy to life, determining to a great extent whether and how the aims of the policy will be realized. Understandably, policy makers want new teachers to raise student achievement, teach to high standards, and promote the learning of all students. However, few beginning teachers could accomplish these goals without some form of regular, on-site guidance and support. This being the case, we were equally interested in examining how induction policy in our site addressed mentor’s working conditions and opportunities to learn how to mentor.

According to most comprehensive induction programs, a formally assigned mentor teacher (or mentoring team) is responsible for many things, from providing the novice with a basic orientation to school procedures and expectations to helping the novice design a standards-based curriculum that is responsive to student learning needs. To accomplish these tasks, mentors need authentic opportunities to work with their beginning teachers around
the real and urgent issues of classroom teaching and learning. This means easy access to beginning teachers and regular times to observe, coach, and co-plan with them.

Although even the best mentor cannot compensate for an inappropriate teaching assignment or a professional culture that discourages collaboration and critical colleagueship (Feiman-Nemser & Katz, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001), quality mentoring can influence the kinds of learning opportunities new teachers provide their students, which can influence student learning outcomes (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005). However, if mentor teachers are to promote effective teaching and learning, then they will need opportunities to learn to mentor in ways that fit the intentions of the induction policy. The bottom line is that both mentor’s working conditions and opportunities for professional development are critical to effective mentoring and to the success of induction policy.

We now examine induction policies in our three sites to see whether and how they establish conditions that promote effective mentoring. First, we consider how different induction policies define the mentor’s role. Second, we consider whether induction policies make adequate provision for teachers to develop their practice as mentors and work with beginning teachers.

**Policy Definitions of the Mentor’s Role**

Although all three sites mandated some form of mentoring for beginning teachers, each differed in how they defined the nature and scope of the mentor’s responsibility. In Connecticut, mentors were expected to provide 1 year of instructional support to 1st-year teachers while continuing to work as full-time, classroom teachers; whereas, evaluation for the purpose of licensure was handled by state-trained assessors who reviewed portfolios submitted by 2nd-year teachers. Although many school-based mentors are likely guided by BEST portfolio requirements, there is nothing in state policy that stipulates this connection. This clear-cut separation of assistance and assessment reflects conventional wisdom in the field of induction, which assumes that beginning teachers are unlikely to share problems and concerns with someone who is also responsible for evaluating them.

Neither California nor Cincinnati defined the mentor’s role in supportive terms exclusively, but their approaches differed in significant ways. California required mentor teachers to provide beginning teachers with 2 years of individualized assistance informed by regular formative assessment. After participating in the process for 2 years, new teachers were eligible for a “clear” credential. Like Connecticut, this was done intentionally to ensure that mentors
remained outside the evaluation loop. In contrast, the policy in Cincinnati
assigned responsibility for both assistance and high-stakes assessment to full-
time consulting teachers who not only helped 1st-year teachers teach to the
district’s content standards, but also made recommendations about whether
the 1st-year teacher’s contract should be renewed. This decision to combine
assistance and assessment reflects a professional stance toward evaluation
that encompasses peer review.
Ultimately, policy makers need to examine the assumptions that shape
their definition of the mentor’s role. Our data calls into question the belief
that thoughtful, open mentoring will only occur if assistance and assessment
are separate. In fact, we found that professional accountability was strongest
in sites where mentors have some responsibility for both assisting and
assessing new teacher’s performance. To illustrate, in New Haven, where the
mentor’s role was limited to instructional support, the degree of profession-
ality exercised was dependent on the individual mentor who had to make
time to work with her assigned beginning teacher. As a result, we saw a great
degree of variance in mentoring practices across the Connecticut site, which
we attributed largely to each mentor’s sense of commitment to the mentor-
mentee relationship.
In contrast, California mentors who integrated formative assessment
with ongoing assistance tended to have a clearer sense of direction for their
mentoring. We attributed this to the consistent use, by mentors, of carefully
crafted standards-based formative assessment tools. Even more dramatically,
in Cincinnati we saw how the responsibility to make consequential decisions
about new teachers contributed to a strong, collective sense of professional
accountability (Yusko, 2001; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, in press). Like in
California, the tools and processes designed to support peer evaluation in
Cincinnati seemed to enable mentors’ willingness and ability to serve the
dual functions of support and assessment.

Provisions for Learning About the Role

Across our sites, mentoring emerged as a core instrument of induction
policy; however, only two sites mandated mentor training. At the time of
our study, Connecticut required 2 days of state-sponsored mentoring train-
ing, whereas California required 3 days of state-approved mentor training.
Importantly, neither required ongoing mentor development, although the
local-control encouraged by BTSA, plus the funding offered to local BTSA
sites, made this possibility more likely, as illustrated in the SCNTP (Santa
Cruz New Teacher Project), where we observed a well-developed system
for ongoing mentor support and development.
In contrast, PAEP policy did not specifically mandate mentor training, although new consulting teachers (or mentors) had access to informal support and problem solving through planned and spontaneous conversations with more experienced consulting teachers, and all PAEP consulting teachers received formal training in the use of district evaluation forms according to district standards. Moreover, oversight by the PAEP panel ensured accountability and provided consulting teachers with monthly opportunities to get help from panel members with specific problems and to learn how to mentor effectively and fairly.

As we have shown, induction policy in California and Connecticut reflects an understanding that mentors are learning a new role by requiring some initial training. If mentor training is an instrument of induction policy, how can it be used effectively? To answer this question, we briefly examine how these two sites with mandated mentor training approached the orientation, training, and development of mentor teachers. Our description and analysis are based on extensive field notes collected during observations of mandated training in both sites, plus the analysis of scripted training materials.

**Mentor training in Connecticut.** In Connecticut, state induction policy dictated that mentor training would be provided by BEST trainers in regional centers located around the state. The state tried to ensure that all mentors received the same basic background by providing trainers with detailed training manuals and scripts. According to the training, BEST mentors should be “facilitators not fixers.” Their primary job was to provide general and subject specific instructional support, not emotional or procedural support. Reflective conversations were presented as a central mentoring strategy, and mentors were encouraged to use such skills as reflective questioning, active listening, and giving objective feedback.

Because BEST mentors were supposed to base their mentoring on teaching and content standards, trainers introduced the CCT, Connecticut’s vision of effective teaching, and gave mentors practice in looking for content-standard indicators in sample teaching artifacts. Finally, mentor teachers learned about portfolio assessments. They studied handbooks designed to help 2nd-year teachers develop their teaching portfolios, reviewed sample entries, and learned about the scoring process. Although mentor teachers were not required to work with 2nd-year teachers, they were asked to encourage beginning teachers to attend state-sponsored portfolio workshops.

Despite all of these efforts, our field observations in New Haven suggested that the state’s vision of mentors, as facilitators of reflective conversations
around standards-based artifacts of practice, remained at cross-purposes with a mentoring structure that required mentors to be full-time teachers. Moreover, it was difficult to see how the model of mentoring promoted in the training could happen without dedicated time for reflective conversations and without a teaching culture that supported close analysis of practice. To illustrate, none of the mentors we observed either practiced or talked about reflective conversations. Even if 2 days of training was insufficient for mentor teachers to develop the skills and dispositions required for the kind of reflective conversations that would challenge prevailing norms of teaching, the mentors we observed simply did not have the time to enact such a vision.

*Mentor training in California.* Like Connecticut, California also mandated mentor training. By law, all new BTSA mentors were expected to attend 2 days of state-approved mentor training as an orientation to their new role. Essential topics addressed during these training sessions included the use of formative assessment and the California teaching standards. In keeping with the local orientation of induction policy in California, this training varied somewhat by the needs of each site. The state-approved mentor training program we observed was developed by program administrators at our California site, the SCNTP.

As a leader in the statewide BTSA program, the SCNTP not only helped to develop key induction policy instruments with the state, including the teaching standards and formative assessment activities, but also they went beyond state mandates in two crucial ways, both of which had a direct impact on mentors work in that site. First, they created new structures, including weekly mentor meetings, dedicated to the ongoing support and development of mentor teachers. Secondly, with the help of state and district funding available to all BTSA projects, they adopted a mentoring model that released teachers full time from their classroom.

The SCNTP mentor training program, *Foundations of Mentoring*, oriented new mentors to the multifaceted role of mentor and introduced specific tools and strategies for making new teacher support as effective as possible. Many of the topics covered in the Connecticut training, such as the importance of building a trusting relationship, the needs of beginning teachers, and the role of standards in assessing new teacher’s level of practice, appeared in the Santa Cruz training. Like Connecticut, mentors also learned about reflective conversations as a central activity of mentoring, and mentors got the message that they were supposed to be change agents working to transform the culture of teaching.
Additionally, training sessions introduced mentors to a set of local tools that had been developed over time to assist and guide their work. These included the Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities (New Teacher Center, 2002), which enabled mentors and new teachers to identify varying levels of teacher competencies within each teaching standard—useful in the formative assessment process—and the collaborative assessment log, which mentors and new teachers used to document their ongoing work together.

Most important in shaping the quality of mentor teacher’s practice, however, was the ongoing support and development that mentors received through weekly 3-hour staff meetings. Notably, this local program feature went beyond the minimum state requirement of 2 days of mentor training. In these staff meetings, mentors talked through problems that arose in the course of their ongoing work with 1st- and 2nd-year teachers, thereby extending their mentoring repertoire and practice using the various tools and processes provided by the program. Additionally, in response to an ever-increasing cast of new mentors, the SCNTP created an internal mentor program where experienced mentors were paired with those new to the role.

Finally, SCNTP partnering districts made a commitment from the beginning to release veteran teachers from the classroom full time for 2 to 3 years. Although a potential hardship for districts who needed more, not fewer, master teachers, full-time release ensured that mentors had both time to mentor and time to learn to mentor.

As this case shows, California induction policy provided the financial resources and policy guidance for a local program (such as the SCNTP) to develop strong mentoring components. Specifically, the state’s funding, teaching standards, and role definition (e.g., assistance and formative assessment) created a platform from which the SCNTP could build a structure for serious mentor teacher development. As a result, the visionary leadership of the talented SCNTP staff was able to advocate widely for the learning needs of new teachers and their mentors.

*Value of combining training with ongoing support.* Together, our cases demonstrate the variations on mentor training that are possible, from the largely informal, though ongoing socialization of consulting teachers (as in Cincinnati); state-mandated and provided up-front training (as in Connecticut); and state mandated but locally provided up-front training, plus locally sponsored ongoing support and development (as in California). To meet the goal of standards-based mentoring for standards-based teaching expressed for each program, these variations are clearly not equal.
State policy makers need to recognize that mentoring is a professional practice that must be learned, not something which comes automatically or easily to classroom teachers. Rather, effective mentoring draws on a specialized knowledge base and skill set that includes an extensive working knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, plus skill in working with adult learners (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). Thus, although training in itself is a good thing, front-loaded training with little or no opportunity for ongoing problem solving and skill development is short sighted. Moreover, mentoring can be a powerful professional development opportunity for experienced teachers and a chance to develop teacher-leadership capacity. To realize this fuller purpose, mentors need opportunities to develop their understanding of teaching and learning to teach, as well as their mentoring repertoire, while they are doing the work of mentoring. By combining formal training with ongoing support and development, the SCNTP gives us a new vision of what is possible.

Ensuring Time for Mentoring

Finally, we need to examine the influence of policy choices on the time provided to mentors for working one-on-one with new teachers. This is a critical, yet often overlooked, component of induction policy. In New Haven, classroom teachers served as mentors because there was no provision in the state-mandated induction policy and no funding available to support full-time mentors. This left local districts with the responsibility of finding teachers who were willing to fit mentoring in around the edges of an already full school day. In contrast, both the SCNTP and PAEP were able to support the full-time release of mentors from classroom duties. The SCNTP managed this provision through a combination of state and local funds, whereas in Cincinnati, full-time release was mandated and paid for entirely with district funds.

In both cases, full-time released mentors had extended periods of time to observe and reflect on the problems of teaching and new teacher learning as they unfolded across a school year. Full-time release allowed mentors and new teachers to engage in co-planning and co-teaching on a regular basis, to observe classrooms together and debrief after, and to explore broader issues in teaching. Our research in these sites suggests the need for induction policy to make new teacher support a priority by ensuring time for mentors and new teachers to work together. In doing so, states and districts send a powerful message about the importance of high-quality support and guidance for new teachers. Table 3 highlights the various ways mentor roles and practice differed across our sites.
Our work is informed by an instructional approach to policy implementation analysis (Cohen & Hill, 2001; see also Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Barnes, 1993), which makes the argument that policy can succeed in changing teaching and learning when that policy affords teachers meaningful and ongoing opportunities to learn what the reform asks of them and when there is coherence among policy instruments and within organizational structure. Cohen and colleagues refer to this as learning policy. Applied to an induction context, where mentors are key actors in carrying the reform to new teachers, policy would thus need to be crafted specifically with mentors learning needs in mind. We now revisit the main points of our argument.

Educational policy is typically created in response to a real or perceived problem. As an official statement that can be publicly measured and accounted for, policy serves as a mechanism for achieving goals. But not all problems can be solved with policy interventions. For example, it is hoped that new teacher induction programs will reduce attrition and support more effective beginning teaching. Both are educational problems worthy of policy intervention, yet the assumption that policy can single-handedly lower attrition and
improve teacher quality is short sighted. Some difficulties faced by novice teachers are endemic to learning to teach and will resolve themselves with time on the job. But many problems and challenges require targeted assistance. For example, a new teacher who does not know what grade-level knowledge and skills to teach in mathematics and how to assess student understanding needs ongoing, subject specific mentoring from someone with the requisite knowledge and skills.

Consequently, general policies mandating mentor support for every beginning teacher are helpful but not sufficient. Needed are clear policies that specify the nature and duration of support received, as well as the programmatic tools and resources preferred. Furthermore, financial resources are needed to support program development and implementation. Equally important are provisions for ongoing mentor development and adequate time for mentors to work with beginning teachers. Thus, induction policy makers face the daunting challenge of determining which policy interventions, under what circumstances, and with what resources, are most likely to reduce or ameliorate the most pressing problems associated with beginning teaching in their locale.

Furthermore, too few examples of best practice exist today, more than 2 decades since the first formal mentoring programs emerged (for noteworthy exceptions, see Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; NCTAF, 1996). Although experienced teachers serve as mentors, the practice of mentoring draws on knowledge and skills that are similar but not identical to K–12 teaching. Although mentor training may be getting more sophisticated, most mentors still learn through trial and error. Even with training and experience, mentors still have to consciously tailor their mentoring practice to shifting local contexts and the emergent needs of each novice in their care. Therefore, to be effective, induction policy must include opportunities for mentors, as local agents of induction, to both discover and define what quality induction entails. Bottom line, induction policies must teach at the same time they mandate.

To be sure, quality induction is not easy to pull off. Programs exist within a set of nested contexts, including state, district, and school, together with various institutional partners, including university and union. Each brings a unique agenda to the table. For example, states work to ensure that schools are filled with qualified teachers; districts are concerned with keeping these qualified teachers; and unions are braced to protect teachers from working conditions that make teaching less desirable. Although clearly related to one another, each set of goals imposes a different filter through which policy decisions must be negotiated.
Still, mentoring continues to be viewed as the core component of induction programs in this country. Through their words and actions, mentors convey to novices what it means to teach and learn to teach in a particular context. Ideally, this message is consistent with the intentions of state and district policy and consonant with current beliefs about quality induction programming. However, as Tyack and Cuban (1995) remind us, “the journey from policy talk at the national and state levels to what occurs in schools and classroom is long, often unpredictable, and complicated” (p. 44).

If policy makers are to increase the odds of effecting significant and positive change in new teachers’ developing practice, they would be well advised to craft induction policy that teach the uses of standards and target mentors’ work in thoughtful ways. At the same time, school culture and context have an enormous influence on how mentoring is enacted. Poor leadership at the top, isolating professional cultures and demoralized staff all work to mediate and/or block thoughtful induction and mentoring. The impact of induction policy will always be limited by the influence of the surrounding context in which the mentor works.

Notes

1. For the purposes of our conceptual argument, we use the term mentor broadly as a reference to experienced teachers assigned to work with novice teachers in the context of formal induction programming. As this article will illustrate, mentor took on subtle differences in each of the three programs reviewed in this study.

2. Recent recommendations for comprehensive induction specifically include at least 1 year of mentored support plus a standards-based summative assessment linked to licensure (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Koppich, 2004).

3. We intentionally use the term well-regarded as each program figured prominently in the literature at the time. Furthermore, in our minds the term carries a neutral stance. In contrast, terms such as comprehensive or well-developed imply a degree of quality that we were not comfortable attributing to programs prior to data collection and analysis.

4. At the time these reports were written, there was little evidence linking program features to retention or student achievement data. By the time our study was completed, however, the demand for this sort of evidence had clearly emerged.

5. Although we recognize that educational policy is a frequently moving target, continually adjusting to new priorities and shifting resources, our descriptions are necessarily limited to programs and practices observed during the data collection period, beginning in 1999 and ending in 2001. Because induction policy has remained rather stable since that time, largely shielded from the external testing mandates and highly qualified provisions associated with No Child Left Behind, we are confident that our findings hold true today.

6. In the early days of the program, mentors received a $1,000 stipend from the state. Budget cuts resulted in this being reduced to $200 per beginning teacher at the time of our study.
7. The Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT) replaced the Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI).
8. Of the 16 states currently mandating and financing mentor support, 11 are limited to the first year of teaching, 4 cover the first 2 years of teaching, while only 1 (Delaware) extends into the 3rd year (Editorial Projects in Education, 2004).
9. It is important to note that Youngs (2007) found positive examples of 2nd-year support in the Connecticut districts he studied, demonstrating the uneven ways in which state policy is implemented at district and school levels.
10. At the time of data collection neither the Cincinnati Public Schools nor the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers had cost break downs for the new teacher portion of the PAEP program. We surmise from this that funding for induction was an integral (and protected) part of the district’s overall instructional plan.

References


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