
Foreword

For many years, the metaphor most widely used to describe entry into teaching has been “sink or swim.” The image this conjures—one of novice teachers bobbing up and down in a sea of raging waters, buffeted by high waves and clutching at a skimpy life preserver—is one that most educators are deeply familiar with. Most can recall in vivid and often painful detail the first rites of passage during their trial years in the classroom. Many former teachers in all walks of life will recount how they did not make it through. How they became discouraged when they were unable to translate into successful practice what they thought they had learned through their preparation programs or their “apprenticeship of observation” as students in schools themselves. They are in plentiful company. About one third of people who enter the teaching profession leave within the first five years of teaching, and the ratios can be higher in schools with the greatest challenges and fewest supports.

Fortunately, this longstanding pattern has begun to change. Most states have launched some kind of mentoring or induction program for beginning teachers—though these vary widely in quality—and the notion that novice teachers should be supported in developing their practice, just as novice doctors, nurses, and engineers are, has become widely accepted, if not practiced.

Carol Bartell’s timely and important book contributes to these efforts in a critically important way. Like many others, this book emphasizes the importance of the early years of teaching and the need for a careful, thoughtful plan for bringing newcomers into the profession. Going beyond these general calls for support, Bartell focuses on the need for a vision of good teaching to guide the mentoring and induction experience and describes how the substantive work of learning to teach can be guided and achieved.

Carol Bartell is uniquely qualified to write this book, having worked extensively with the leading efforts to develop standards for teacher licensing during the 1990s. She worked with the Interstate New Teacher

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Assessment and Support Consortium—an organization of more than 30 states that crafted the first nationwide guidelines outlining knowledge, skills, and dispositions for beginning teacher licensing—and with the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment efforts that brought these standards to life through a massive mentoring and assessment initiative in the state of California. Both efforts have helped us better understand the importance of standards-based support during the crucial entry period into teaching. Both efforts have also recognized the need to assess teacher progress and to use the results of those assessments to nurture and support teacher development.

California has been involved in piloting, implementing, and studying the induction of new teachers since the late 1980s. It is one of very few states that have included an induction experience in the credentialing structure. Bartell summarizes that work in a way that is useful to those developing and implementing induction programs in California and elsewhere. She gives research-based, concrete examples of how successful programs can operate to support careful and thoughtful teacher development. She probes the motivations to teach, traces the development of teaching expertise, and the incentives to keep teachers learning and growing during the early years and beyond. Finally, she lays out a framework for local and state policies needed to support and sustain induction and mentoring programs.

The examples and teacher quotations included in the book ground the work in the lives and experiences of beginning teachers. Their words remind us of the challenges facing beginning teachers in contemporary classroom settings. They also highlight the importance of high-quality mentoring during the induction period.

If teachers are viewed primarily as transmitters of knowledge, one could argue that they need little more than basic content knowledge and the ability to impart this knowledge to students. But teachers are expected to do much more than pass along information. They must be prepared to serve as diagnosticians, planners, facilitators, and leaders who know a great deal about the learning process and have a wide repertoire of strategies at their disposal. They must understand their students as individual learners and take responsibility for engaging each and every student in authentic and powerful learning. It is the latter, more complex vision of teaching that guides this book.

This vision also requires that teachers are thoroughly grounded in subject matter and pedagogy during their preparation years, but are never considered to be “finished products.” They continue to learn, develop, and perfect their teaching throughout their careers as they interact with students and their colleagues. Induction then becomes a bridge from a strong preservice preparation to expert practice that is honed and refined over time.

Teacher attrition continues to be an issue for all schools, and it particularly impacts urban settings, where salaries are lower, working conditions are more challenging, fewer well-prepared and experienced teachers

remain, and students are frequently least well served. To solve the problems of high-turnover schools, districts need not only to hire highly qualified teachers but also to sustain and support them in their efforts to improve student learning. Bartell tackles the tough and crucial need to give special focus to the induction of new teachers in urban schools. She also deals with the knotty problem of serving the underprepared teacher who enters teaching through alternative routes, arguing for a thoughtful blending of a preparation and induction experience that does not shortchange the teacher or, most important, the students.

However, Bartell argues that induction is about more than retaining teachers. It is about helping all teachers become more professional and better at what they do. It is about using the expertise of experienced teachers to guide the novice teacher. It is about giving teachers careful and thoughtful feedback on their work. And, most importantly, it is about improving student learning.

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