Promoting Beginning Teachers’ Equitable Instruction: A Developmental Approach

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How can schools support novice teachers so they not only survive, but learn and develop in ways that are collaborative and meaningful? If you talk with any new teacher you will hear a story that is shared by thousands of new teachers nationwide. When compared to fields such as medicine, engineering, architecture, nursing, and law which recognize the needs of new professionals more fully (Reiman, Spears, Bunch, Patch, & Waite, 2000), some observers have called education “the profession that eats its young.”

As well, recent reviews of literature indicate that very few teacher induction programs are intentionally working to help beginning teachers learn and thrive (e.g., classroom management, equitable instruction, equitable instruction, meeting the needs of diverse learners). Additionally, new models of peer collaboration between beginning teachers are in short supply. The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to determine the effects of a collaborative coaching program which focused on instructional equity and was adapted from the Generating Expectations for Student Achievement (GESA) (Grayson & Martin, 1997) program.

Fourteen rural middle school beginning teachers in the experimental group learned to coach each other during the sixteen week program. Thirteen beginning teachers were in the control group. Learning and developmental gains for both groups were measured by pretesting and posttesting using the Rest’s Defining Issues Test which assesses ethical judgement reasoning and the Gibson – Dembro Teacher Efficacy Scale which measures professional efficacy. Gains in equitable instruction were assessed from 30 minute pre-training and post-training teaching videotapes of teachers in the experimental group. Teacher instructional interactions were analyzed using an observation system developed by the GESA program.

The staff development intervention for beginning teachers was based on a theoretical framework for learning and coaching new skills (Joyce & Showers, 1995) and promoting psychological development (Sprethall & Thies – Sprethall, 1983). The following conditions for promoting adult psychological development were applied: complex new role (beginning teacher and coach), guided analyses and reflection (careful examination of instruction), balance between the new role and analyses/reflection, support (assistance from colleague and mentor) and challenge (beginning teaching), and the continuity of all the conditions. The intervention included workshop sessions on areas of disparity identified in the GESA program, along with a formalized process of peer coaching and conferencing. After each session, pairs of beginning teachers observed each other’s teaching, completed self – analyses and reflections, and initiated peer-to - peer reflective conferencing. Written self - reflections and analyses were submitted to the workshop facilitator who returned written comments and feedback differentiated according to the needs of each beginning teacher. The instructional foci were organized to parallel the new Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Competencies (INTASC).

There were no significant gains by the experimental group in either ethical reasoning or self-efficacy. However, post-hoc analyses revealed that more comparison group participants than experimental group participants showed decreases in self-efficacy levels. The fact that the experimental group showed no decline could be seen as positive, given the stresses of the first years of teaching. In comparison the control group showed a decline in professional self-efficacy even though it was comprised of more second and third-year teachers.

Analysis of the pretraining and post-training teaching videotapes indicated an overall 42 percent gain in equitable instruction for the experimental group. All but one of the teachers in the experimental group showed significant gains in the use of more equitable teaching behaviors. The results of this study suggest that collaborative models of professional and psychological development, especially during the formative teaching years, hold a key to improved instruction and enlarged teaching repertoire. Furthermore, this model of beginning teachers coaching one another with the guidance and support of a lead mentor needs to be explored in school systems with a short supply of highly skilled mentor teachers.


\[\text{A copy of this study is available from the MCTP for } \$5.00 \text{ to cover shipping and handling.}\]

* This study relates to materials in Chapter XVIII of the Strategy Guide and to the Adult Learning and Developmental Framework below.

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Learning/Coaching Elements \tabularnewline
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1. Knowledge \tabularnewline
2. Demonstration \tabularnewline
3. Practice with Feedback \tabularnewline
4. Adapt and Generalize \tabularnewline
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Joyce & Showers, 1995

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Conditions for Development \tabularnewline
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1. Significant New Role Taking \tabularnewline
2. Guided Reflection \tabularnewline
3. Balance between Experience and Reflection \tabularnewline
4. Support and Challenge \tabularnewline
5. Continuity in all of the above \tabularnewline
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Sprethall & Thies-Sprethall (1983) \tabularnewline
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