Socialization of the Beginning Teacher: A Theoretical Model from the Empirical Literature

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The first year of teaching has been described as a time of survival for the beginning teacher, one of the most difficult and critical periods in a teacher's career (Veenman, 1984). It is during this transition that the teacher begins to develop the skills and habits that form the foundation for future teaching success. It is also during this time that many beginning teachers get discouraged and abandon their teaching careers. Thus, the appropriate solution to the problem of retention of academically able teachers is the improvement of school conditions and the provisions of support for beginning teachers.

 Current organizational practices do not adequately ease the transition of beginning teachers into the educational profession. To understand the processes by which teachers cope with entry and socialization experiences, a perspective to examine key features of the beginning teacher's experience is identified in this study.

RATIONALE

According to national reform reports and reports from both local and state education agencies, a high percentage of those leaving teaching are both new to the field and academically able. One of the primary reasons for leaving is the lack of support from both their principals and colleagues (Schlechty, 1984). Since there is a shortage of capable people entering the teaching profession, efforts must be made not only to attract competent individuals to the field, but also to socialize teachers to become an effective part of the organization.

Teaching has been marked by difficulty in the recruitment of professionals. Data collected from the Center for the Study of the Teaching Profession, found that in 1986, 7.3 percent of freshmen entering college stated an intention to pursue a career in elementary or secondary education. This is an increase of 2.5 percent from 1982; however, it is still only one-third of the 21.7 percent who intended to pursue such careers in 1966 (Astin, et al., 1987).

At first glance these figures may be alarming. However, if all these interested students pursued their interest in education, then chances are the field would not be facing a teacher shortage. The important issue is not getting students interested in education, but rather retaining them once they are in the field.

It is believed that teacher attrition is near its lowest levels in 25 years. However, some data suggests that teacher attrition rates will rise over the next ten years (Wise, 1987). The probability that a particular teacher will leave a school follows a U-shaped curve: 20 to 25 percent for a beginning teacher, 1 to 5 percent for a mid-career teacher, and 20 to 25 percent for teachers approaching retirement (Grissmer and Kirby, 1987).

These figures are distressing. However, they become an even greater concern when they are linked to another common research finding: the most qualified beginning teachers may be the first to leave (Schlechty & Vance, 1981; Darling-Hammond, 1984). If educators are to address the retention issue by modifying current organizational practices, a perspective from which to examine key features of the beginning teacher's experience must be identified.

LOGICAL STRUCTURE

Historically, organizational entry has been studied from at least two distinct perspectives. In one, the dominant theme has been recruit turnover. The other has focused on organizational socialization in which entry represents a major phase. Fundamentally, both approaches to turnover are based on an assumption of rationality. Newcomers are believed to be rational beings who enter unfamiliar organizational settings with preformed conscious expectations about their new jobs and organizations, which, if met, lead to satisfaction, and if unmet, lead to voluntary turnover. For example, a new math teacher may enter a classroom expecting that all students enjoy math. If this person teaches an honors math class, more than likely that expectation will be met. However, if this same new math teacher enters a math class in which students are disinterested, undoubtedly that expectation will be unmet and lead to dissatisfaction and possible turnover. This perspective is limited since it ignores the continual process of adjusting expectations and making sense of experiences.

Louis (1980) provided an alternative approach which took into account two things which are of particular importance to this study. First, he describes the charac-

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teristics of the newcomer's experience. And secondly, he explains how a newcomer copes with those experiences through the process of "sensemaking."

Newcomer's Experiences

There are three levels of a newcomer's experience which Louis discusses: change, contrast, and surprise. *Change* is defined as differences between the old and the new setting of the individual. With a new job, the individual experiences a change in role and often in professional identity, from student to teacher, for instance. The more differences between the old and new setting, the more an individual has to cope. For example, a beginning teacher may have student taught in a setting in which there was a great deal of guidance and nurturing from both the cooperating teacher and college advisor. Now this teacher is in an environment which is more isolated. Since the support received as a student teacher is no longer there, a major change is experienced from the old setting to the new.

Contrast is associated with the process of letting go of old roles. Each individual who enters a new setting brings experiences from a previous setting. Contrast will emerge when experiences from the past cannot be associated with present experiences. The more contrasts, the greater the strain on the newcomer's experience. For example, a beginning teacher may be a student from a college in which resources are bountiful; now the teacher is in a poor school district in which resources are few and far between. Contrasts represent subjective differences betwen new and old settings by which newcomers characterize and otherwise define the new situation.

The third feature of the entry experience is *surprise*, which represents a difference between an individual's anticipations and subsequent experiences in the new setting. The subject of surprise may be the job, the organization, or self. Louis described several forms of surprise that often arise during the encounter stage and require adaptation on the part of the newcomer.

The first form of surprise occurs when conscious expectations of the job are not fulfilled in the newcomer's early job experiences. For example, a beginning teacher may naively think that all students want to learn and love being in school. After a short period of time, the beginning teacher may realize that those initial assessments of students are not realistic.

A second form of surprise occurs when expectations (both conscious and unconscious) about oneself are unmet. A beginning teacher may have thought that disciplining a student who was out of line would never be a problem. However, when the time came, the beginning teacher realized that disciplining a student was not as easy as expected, nor was the situation as easily handled as anticipated.

A third form of surprise arises when unconscious job expectations are unmet or when features of the job are unanticipated. For example, a beginning teacher might have expected more free time and is faced with the need to spend out-of-school hours preparing for classes.

A fourth form of surprise arises from difficulties in accurately forecasting internal reactions to a particular new experience. A beginning teacher may realize that putting in a great many hours of class preparation is part of the job, but would have no idea how tired one would feel after a month of sixty-hour work weeks.

The fifth and final form of surprise comes from the cultural assumptions that newcomers make. Surprise results from the failure of cultural assumptions that the newcomer brought from previous settings to serve as operating guides in the new setting. For example, in one school the staff norms may include working in the classroom for several hours after student dismissal. In another school, the staff norms may include leaving school but working on classroom activities at home. The newcomer may incorrectly evaluate the second situation using norms of the first.

Appreciation of changes, contrasts, and surprise characteristics of beginning teachers' entry experiences is essential in designing organizational structures and theory that would facilitate and explain the transition of beginning teachers. Many contemporary theorists argue that the ultimate structure of an organization is a consequence of the efforts of organizational participants to make sense of the experiences they encounter while living and working within an organization. The process of making sense of organizational experiences reflects an individual's previous extra-organizational experiences and continuing intra-organizational experiences. The sensemaking processes engaged in by individuals, by groups of individuals, and by groups of groups are continuous and constantly changing as their experience of the organization changes (Carroll, 1981).

The objectives of this study derivative from the theoretical structure were as follows:

1. To describe the experiences of beginning teachers:
   • To what extent do the expectations of beginning teachers about themselves, the job, and the organization match their experiences:
   • Which experiences, if any, create a condition of surprise for beginning teachers?
2. To describe the socialization process of beginning teachers:
   • To what extent do individual inputs (i.e., past experiences, training) hinder or facilitate the beginning teacher's interpretations of experiences?
   • To what extent do organizational inputs (i.e., colleagues, policies) hinder or facilitate the beginning teacher's interpretations of experiences?

METHODOLOGY

Meta-Analysis. A meta-analytic study involves three steps: (1) relevant empirical studies are gathered; (2) studies with inadequate methodologies are discarded; and (3) conclusions from remaining studies are assembled and compared in an effort to find consistent results. There are several meta-analytic techniques available. In this study two meta-analytic techniques were used to analyze the data.

First, research studies were analyzed using a form of propositional analysis in which repetitive findings and conclusions were recast in the form of generalizations about beginning teacher experiences, expectations, and impact on the socialization process. The propositional analysis method of analyzing existing research works best when the previous research has been organized along similar experimental paradigms. Using this methodology, the main task is to compare the original investigators' final propositions and conclusions.

Secondly, case studies were analyzed using the case study method outlined by Yin and Heald (1975), in which content analysis through the presence and the intensity of common characteristics, events, and outcomes were distilled. This type of analysis works best when previous research consists of a heterogeneous collection of case studies.

An instrument was developed to guide data collection. Categories were identified to facilitate the search for evidence relevant to the objectives of the study. However, the categories which were formed based on the review of related research were expanded to allow for inclusion of all evidence from the studies.

The data sources included empirical studies, theoretical literature, and case studies. The main source of literature came from an ERIC search. The descriptors used were: beginning teachers and their concerns, problems, and attitudes. After the studies were collected and evaluated, cross references were used to expand the data sources. Finally, a manual search was done to ensure that the most up-to-date sources were identified.

Studies examined were limited to the mid-seventies to the present. The scope was narrowed to ensure that the concerns of and issues surrounding beginning teachers were applicable to the contemporary context in the field. Studies conducted before the mid-seventies are less meaningful due to changes in the educational system (teacher shortages, decline in student test scores, decline in student enrollment, etc.), the economy, the labor market, and the role of the teacher. The studies accumulated must have dealt with beginning teachers, not experienced ones. The term beginning teacher in this study meant the first year of full-time employment in the teaching profession.

Initially, the data were disaggregated into two major areas: (1) beginning teacher expectations; and (2) expectations of beginning teachers. These major areas were then subdivided into six cells for analysis. The cells included:

1. Beginning teacher expectations about the job;
2. Beginning teacher expectations about themselves;
3. Beginning teacher expectations abut the organization;
4. Events that happen to beginning teachers which they find surprising;
5. Individual inputs which impact socialization; and
6. Organizational inputs which impact socialization.

Each data source was summarized in relation to effect; i.e., what propositions or generalizations abut beginning teacher experiences can be supported at what level of confidence from R & D studies? Is this different from an analysis of the case studies? This process of triangulation was employed to generate cross-data source generalizations.

Precautions were taken to protect the internal and external validity of the design of this study. First, efforts were taken to identify all relevant published studies of the period of time selected. Each study was synthesized and coded taking into account definitions, design, treatment of data, and strength of conclusions.

Two problematic issues were specifically addressed: (1) the quality of the individual studies; (2) the accumulation of evidence in support of the conclusions of this study. The use of the comparative case survey technique and propositional analysis constituted a triangulation process to eliminate conceptually or statistically flawed studies. Completely inadequate research reports (*i.e.*, absence of detailed information to support the conclusions) were discarded. Related lines of inquiry were joined and conflicting as well as supporting evidence was enumerated. Thus, the conclusions of this study reflect the strength of agreement among studies analyzed.

FINDINGS

When beginning teachers enter the school, they begin coping with their entry experiences. Some of these experiences are expected and easily adjusted to, while other experiences are surprises caused, in part, by unmet expectations. These unmet expectations may cause stress, frustration and ultimately lead to leaving the profession. When coping with these experiences (surprises or not), the beginning teacher goes through a socialization process. For an analysis of the data, a number of propositions were generated regarding the beginning teacher (See Table 1).

It was found that in the socialization process, or attributing meaning to surprising events when expectations are not met, beginning teachers rely on organizational and individual inputs (Figure A).
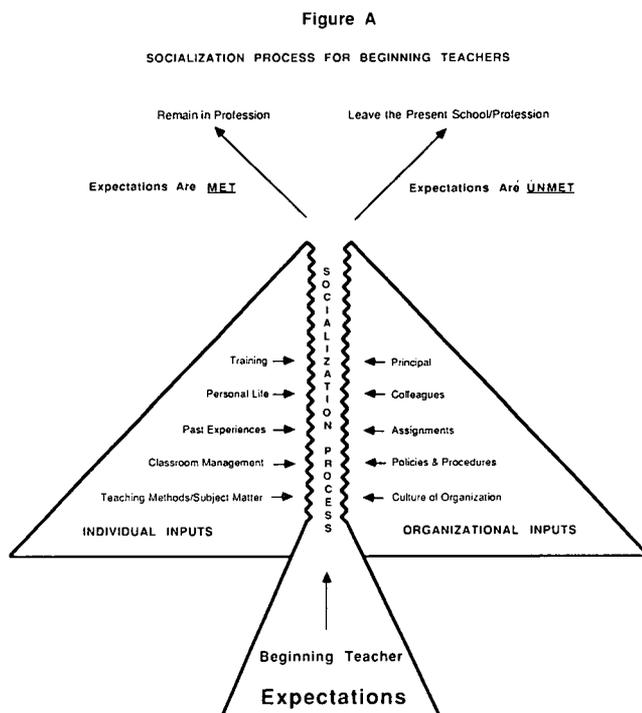
INDIVIDUAL INPUTS

In making sense of an organization, newcomers may rely on a number of individual inputs. It was found that for the beginning teacher, individual inputs include past experiences, classroom management, knowledge of subject manner, teaching methodologies and personal life.

Past experiences with similar situations were found to help beginning teachers cope with current situations. As has already been pointed out, coping is less difficult when there is a positive relationship between the new job and a previously held position. Thus, the less coping beginning teachers had to deal with, the less stress and, therefore, greater satisfaction within the position they found.

Classroom management was the most seriously perceived problem of beginning teachers. This is not to suggest that all beginning teachers experience problems with classroom control or discipline. However, it was an area which affected their sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Table 1

Summary of Propositions

A. Day to day experiences in the actual setting of the school when beginning teachers are full-time faculty members have a tremendous influence on their socialization process.

B. Experiences from the past; namely, the setting where the beginning teacher is trained, does have an impact on beginning teachers regarding their attitudes and behaviors when entering the school environment.

C. Beginning teachers rely on their training to meet the needs and challenges of their new position The quality, components, and type of training program influence the interpretations of beginning teachers of their beginning experience.

D. The nature (length, type of experiences) and content of teacher training programs relate directly to the perceptions of areas of competence and areas of concern identified by beginning teachers.

E. The cultural assumptions of beginning teacher are not matched by their actual experiences in the classroom, thus causing numerous areas of surprise and breakdowns in their socialization processes.

F. Beginning teachers enter the school with certain expectations about the organization regarding the professionalism of colleagues, parental support, guidance of the principal, and inservice programs established by the school, but find that these expectations are not consistent with reality.

G. Beginning teachers rely on more experienced teachers for advice and support, particularly of those at their own grade level. Therefore, the socialization process is impacted on by the input of colleagues. However, the strength of this input is reduced by the limitation of discussions to minor issues. The beginning teacher's fear of appearing less competent inhibits the ability of experienced colleagues to inform the socialization process.

H. The strains, anxieties, and socialization process of beginning teachers are not addressed in orientation programs or in the policies and procedures developed as part of the new teacher induction process.

I. The assignments and job responsibilities of beginning teachers need to reflect their new professional status and be selected to ensure a smooth transition into the teaching profession.

J. Principals and beginning teachers usually agree on the factors which are thought to be most important to teaching success: classroom control; communication skills; and preparation.

K. Areas which principals felt were handled adequately by beginning teachers were generally in the area of knowledge skills, an individual input into their socialization process.

L. Beginning teachers are expected to cope with the same circumstances as experienced teachers; but do not necessarily have the full range of skills necessary.

M. Perceived problems of beginning teachers fall into three main categories: control (disciplining students, maintaining order in the classroom); motivation (invigorating students to achieve to their greatest ability, maintaining interest); and individualizing instruction (the ability to teach groups with a wide range of ability).

Figure A

SOCIALIZATION PROCESS FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

Remain in Profession   Leave the Present School/Profession

Expectations Are **MET**   Expectations Are **UNMET**

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Training →   ← Principal

Personal Life →   ← Colleagues

Past Experiences →   ← Assignments

Classroom Management →   ← Policies & Procedures

Teaching Methods/Subject Matter →   ← Culture of Organization

INDIVIDUAL INPUTS   ORGANIZATIONAL INPUTS

Beginning Teacher

Expectations

Another factor for beginning teachers regarding their socialization process was found to be their training. It is important that the individual upon entering a new position is trained properly to meet the needs and challenges of the new job. For beginning teachers an understanding of the *knowledge of subject manner* and diverse *teacher methodologies* were essential. It was found that beginning teachers who were trained from a perspective that did not adequately join methods and practice had difficulty coping. Thus, keeping students motivated, while successfully communicating the subject matter, became an area of concern for the beginning teacher.

It became obvious that an individual input into the socialization process for beginning teachers was their *personal life*. There are a number of factors outside the walls of the classroom which a beginning teacher must also deal with, such as getting settled in the community, as well as personal issues, such as relationships. Teaching has been characterized as having short hours and long vacations. However, it was found that it did not take long for beginning teachers to realize that their role of being a teacher did not start and finish when entering and leaving the school building. It was necessary for most of them to bring work home. Whether beginning teachers did this work at night or on the weekend, it was reported to be an invasion of their personal life.

ORGANIZATIONAL INPUTS

Aside from the individual inputs mentioned above, it was also found that organizational inputs contributed to the socialization process of beginning teachers. Organi-zational inputs include a number of components such as cultural assumptions, teaching assignments, colleagues, policies and procedures, and the principal.

The culture of the organization was found to be a key factor in the socialization process. Beginning teachers had *cultural assumptions* about the school, colleagues and the administration. If beginning teachers did not check with others to confirm their assumptions and discovered as time went on that their colleagues were not working under the same cultural assumptions, then beginning teachers, in order to cope, had to revise their own beliefs to be in tune with the school.

Assignments for beginning teachers were often found to be the most unpleasant. In general, beginning teachers were assigned the largest, most difficult classes, or the least desirable extracurricular assignments. This may be due to the fact that the longer one is in the school system, the greater one's seniority. Thus, experienced teachers have the option to choose what they would like to be responsible for rather than being assigned the unwanted duties.

Another aspect of the organizational inputs which was found to have an impact on beginning teachers were their *colleagues*. Most beginning teachers tended to rely on a few select colleagues for support and assistance in the task of learning to teach. Beginning teachers considered their colleagues very helpful explaining the "tricks of the trade" which could make some of their tasks more manageable. However, beginning teachers did not want to go to their more experienced colleagues regarding issues which could have made them appear incompetent.

The structure of the organization may also incorporate certain *policies and procedures* which could influence the socialization process. These can take the form of certain guidelines exclusively for beginning teachers; such as having term exams reviewed by the department head before being administered, or turning grades in early in order for someone to check to see if they are in line with those of others. Unfortunately, it was found that few policies, if any at all, were specifically designed for beginning teachers.

Although the *principal* is certainly not the only influential force on beginning teachers, newcomers looked to them for support and guidance. Principals' potential power by virtue of their position and personal expertise underscores their role in the socialization process of beginning teachers. The principal wears many hats and may be seen in different lights by various people. Beginning teachers saw the role of the principal as an evaluator of their work, an assigner of classes and extracurricular duties, the allocator of monies, supplies and materials, and usually as the ultimate authority in disciplining students. They did not view the principal as someone they could confide in and turn to for advice.

The individual and organizational inputs described above clearly indicate the multitude of forces which impact and formulate the socialization process of beginning teachers. It is no wonder attrition is so high for teachers in their first few years when one realizes beginning teachers' experiences do not meet their expectations.

Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate beginning teachers' expectations and experiences as they relate to the individual and organizational inputs of the socialization process.

The implication of the findings of this study is clear; *i.e.*, a multi-dimensional approach is needed to understand the socialization process of beginning teachers. To understand the attitudes and behaviors of beginning teachers, their individual and organizational inputs into the socialization process must be recognized.

Recommendations

Recommendations resulting from this study involve key areas such as teacher education programs, experienced teachers, and researchers.

Teacher Education Programs. This is an area currently under great scrutiny. As teacher educators and policy makers begin to develop and implement improvements and innovations, attention to the socialization process of beginning teachers is warranted.

First, teacher education programs must deal with the realities beginning teachers may face in their first experiences in the school. Colleges of Education are doing students a disservice if singular, simple perspectives are favored over multiple, complex perspectives that more accurately reflect the work of the teacher. Knowledge of the foundations of education, child and adolescent growth and development, pedagogy, and theory and research need to be joined with the realities of the classroom to prepare "reflective practitioners."

Secondly, when developing programs in teacher education, constraints and limitations need attention. All things cannot be taught to all future teachers. There is a constant need for assessment, feedback, and discussion. This will enable schools of education to stay abreast of contemporary realities and adjust their program when necessary.

It is also important for teacher education programs to allow as much diversity as possible. This diversity not only entails the types of methodologies taught, but how these methodologies are employed in a variety of settings. Beginning teachers are sometimes surprised by their lack of knowledge relating to teaching methods and

Table 2

Individual Inputs:
Differences Between Expectations and Experiences

INPUTS	EXPECTATIONS	EXPERIENCES
Classroom Management	difficult but manageable/ students are willing to learn and easily motivated	very demanding and stressful/ students don't care and are difficult to motivate
Past Experiences	will be similar to future situations	past experiences do not coincide with present ones
Personal Life	separate professional from personal life/ plenty of time to prepare	there is no separation/ takes up all free time
Subject Matter	strong knowledge	strong knowledge
Teaching Methods	ability to teach all students	inability to reach students with a wide range of ability
Training	attitude and behavior open and flexible	become rigid and structured

Table 3

Organizational Inputs:
Differences Between Expectations and Experiences

INPUTS	EXPECTATIONS	EXPERIENCES
Assignments	would be treated fairly	usually given the most difficult classes and assignments that no one else wants
Colleagues	giving support and guidance	giving support and guidance (although limited)
Culture of Organization	colleagues, parents and students are all thoroughly committed to education	lack of care and true commitment
Policy & Procedures	special policies and procedures will be provided	no special policy and procedures were available
Principal	can turn to him/her for support and guidance	seen as the evaluator, someone distant

their inability to incorporate what they do know in various situations.

Finally, it is imperative that teacher education programs play an active role in the future of their former students. No one believes that all learning ends with the receipt of a diploma. The university may play even a bigger role in the success of teachers after they begin full-time work in schools. To be a part of their future, teacher education programs can offer workshops at the university, and/or discussion groups led by professors in which beginning teachers can vent frustrations and ask for ideas and suggestions in areas of concern.

Experienced teachers. As discovered in the data, beginning teachers believe experienced colleagues in the school are their greatest source of guidance and support. Unfortunately, it was also found that most beginning teachers only go to them for advice regarding issues which will not reflect their incompetence.

Experienced teachers must understand the importance of their role in the socialization process of the beginning teacher. They are a valuable resource for the beginning teacher and must learn to lend advice and support in a nonevaluative and supportive way that will not question the newcomer's competence. Therefore, experienced teachers may need to take the initiative to inquire how a beginning teacher is doing in a nonthreatening, non-judgmental way. This can be done through informal discussion groups, inviting them to sit in on their classes, or offering ideas and suggestions regarding issues which they felt would have been helpful when they broke into the profession. The point is, all precautions must be taken so that the beginning teacher does not feel their competency is being questioned.

Researchers. This study brings to one's attention a number of areas which need to be addressed by future research. There is obviously a need for future research related to the continued critical examination of the basic question: How can individual and organizational inputs have a positive affect regarding the socialization process of beginning teachers? Specifically, there needs to be a larger knowledge base in the following areas:

1. The type of assignments and work load which is both feasible for beginning teachers to handle and most beneficial to their professional development;
2. The types of help which are most readily accepted by beginning teachers;
3. The relationships between beginning teachers and their experienced colleagues;
4. The principals' role regarding their relationship with beginning teachers.
5. The relationship between different types of school cultures and the success of beginning teachers;
6. How differences in the range of life experiences affect beginning teachers;
7. The identification of the components of Teacher Education Programs which affect beginning teachers (*i.e.*, method classes, theoretical work, subject matter, student teaching);
8. The identification of effective strategies which will allow student teachers a wider set of experiences;
9. An evaluation of inductive programs must be addressed in order to assess which programs are effective;
10. The relationship between the success of beginning teachers and the goals of the school.

There is always a need to continue studying the concerns and problems of beginning teachers. But it is time to study the solutions that can alleviate these problems. There is also a lack of longitudinal studies on successful teachers. Understanding how they have coped within the school system, one may learn how to better deal with beginning teachers.

This study is a small section in the complex picture of a beginning teacher. It is by no means an ending. It is a first step in trying to understand what beginning teachers experience through their socialization process of individual and organizational inputs.

The first year of teaching has been described as a time of survival for the beginning teacher, one of the most difficult and critical periods in a teacher's career. Current school policies and organizational practices do not adequately ease the transition of beginning teachers into the educational profession. To identify effective practices and understand the processes by which beginning teachers cope with entry and socialization experiences, a model as described in this study must be used to facilitate the development of programs to support beginning teachers.

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