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How Can Schools Support Beginning Teachers? A Call for Timely Induction and Mentoring for Effective Teaching

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Abstract

Induction programs largely focus on informing the beginning teacher about the school culture and infrastructure yet the core business of education is teaching and learning. This qualitative study uses a survey, questionnaire, and interviews to investigate 10 beginning teachers' needs towards becoming effective teachers in their first year of teaching. Findings were synonymous with studies in other countries that showed they required more support in the induction process, particularly around the school context, networking, managing people, and creating work-life balances. It also found that these beginning teachers required more support in school culture and infrastructure with stronger consideration of developing teaching practices, such as: pedagogical knowledge development and behaviour management. It highlighted willing and capable assigned mentors who can model practices and provide feedback on the beginning teachers' practices as pivotal to induction and mentoring processes.

The preparation of teachers is a focus in many reports and reviews into teaching and teacher education (e.g., Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training [HRSCEVT], 2007; Masters, 2009). Governments, education systems, and the general public want effective teachers for which university-school partnership arrangements assist in facilitating the preparation of beginning teachers. For instance, professional experiences (i.e., practicum and internship) provide the link between university coursework and pragmatic school experiences for preservice teachers in the lead up to their first year of teaching. Despite preservice teachers valuing teaching theories and practicum, bridging the theory-practice gap is an issue for beginning teachers, indicated by early-career teachers' reflections on their university preparation (Allen, 2009).

A teacher graduating from university commences teaching with the same responsibilities as more experienced teachers in the school; yet it is widely recognised that beginning teachers need support in their first few years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Le Maistre & Paré, 2010), particularly with teachers leaving the profession in those early years with a seemingly "sink or swim" approach from many schools (Howe, 2006, p. 287). Howe places emphasis on assistance beginning teachers with teaching rather than assessing them in these formative years of teaching, in which mentoring appears to be a preferred support mechanism as it draws upon the expertise of existing school staff who can provide immediate benefits to the beginning teacher. Induction programs have been developed by education departments in Australia with attention to school culture and infrastructure (e.g., "Flying Start" program in Queensland). However, increasing benefits to beginning teachers that include mentoring for effective teaching require quality preparation and careful selection of mentors (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Indeed, literature (Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009; Howe, 2006; Hudson, Beutel, & Hudson, 2009; Martin, Andrews, & Gilbert, 2009) calls for trained mentors who can effectively guide beginning teachers through what may well be one of their most difficult years of teaching. Through quality mentoring, beginning teachers can develop a repertoire of problem-solving strategies for dealing with the practicalities and complexities associated with contextual school and teaching situations (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010).

There is little evidence on the effect of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher attrition rates including the levels of support required, desirable mentor-mentee partnerships, and how a whole school approach can assist the beginning teacher (Long, 2009). A whole school approach may be necessary as other school staff can contribute within their areas of expertise, especially as some mentor-mentee relationships can breakdown or not materialise (Martin et al., 2009). It is expected that some beginning teachers may discover through the full responsibility of teaching that this was not the career for them (e.g., Fry, 2010). Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies in support mechanism such as mentoring standards and, as a result, beginning teachers may feel isolated and unsupported with a growing dissatisfaction for teaching as a career (Benson, 2008; Hudson et al., 2009). Establishing a professional learning community (PLC) that supports the beginning teacher may comprise of a range of staff, not only teaching staff, who can assist the beginning teacher through purposeful guidance to ensure effective assimilation into a teaching career. More specifically, it is suggested that beginning teachers are mentored around resilience strategies to counteract attrition rates (Keogh, Garvis, & Pendergast, 2010), and that any program associated with retention of beginning teachers should focus on developing positive perceptions of the professional while increasing beginning teacher confidence to work and teach in their new school environments (Sharp, 2006).

Beginning teachers have articulated issues that may lead to distress such as understanding the school culture and infrastructure, learning how to be an effective teacher, and working productively with the wider school community (Cooper & Stewart, 2009). Goddard and Goddard (2006) used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to discover that emotional exhaustion was a significant reason for leaving the teaching profession in Queensland. In addition, O'Brien and Goddard (2006) claim that school environments that stifle beginning teachers' innovative practices are associated with burnout. A psychological study involving 492 beginning teachers by Gavish and Friedman (2010) identified three predictors of teacher burnout, viz: "(a) lack of appreciation and professional recognition from students; (b) lack of appreciation and professional recognition from the public, and (c) lack of collaborative and supportive ambience" (p. 141). Lack of appreciation from students may be aligned with management of student behaviour, which is recognised as a key reason for teachers leaving the profession (Unal & Unal, 2009). Managing challenging students can lead to emotional exhaustion (Maag, 2008) with a direct correlation between managing negative behaviours and stress (Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007; Yoon, 2002). Gavish and Friedman's second predictor is the concern beginning teachers have with gaining parental approval of their teaching, and the third predictor can be linked to the school's support environment, including access to human and material resources.

Teachers and school executives need to have input into developing beginning teachers, which acts not only as another moderation process for an education system but also assists the development of education occurring within the particular school. Understanding how to support beginning teachers must include beginning teachers' views on how they experience support within their schools. These viewpoints may help to devise strategies for supporting them in their early careers. From a beginning teacher perspective, the research question was: How can schools support beginning teachers?

Methods

This qualitative study investigates how 10 beginning primary teachers (2 males, 8 females) are supported in their schools within their first year of teaching. Two participants (one of each gender) were over 30 years of age while the others were between 20 and 29 years of age. Their classes varied with eight participants teaching single classes between Year 1-7 in the primary school, one teaching multiple grades in the lower primary (i.e., a Year 2/3 composite class) and Participant 10 was a teacher of French to various classes in the upper primary. Six of these early-career teachers taught in schools located on the outskirts of an Australian metropolitan area and four taught in schools within this area.

Data collection methods included a five-part Likert scale survey, an extended written response questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions. The Likert scale survey was devised around the five factor model of mentoring (Hudson, 2007). This survey was validated in the context of mentoring preservice teachers (Hudson, Skamp, & Brooks, 2005) and may provide an indication of mentoring for beginning teachers. As the research question focuses on beginning teachers' perspectives, the survey was aligned to gather their perspectives. The questionnaire required written responses about: their greatest achievements and challenges, existing school support, mentoring support, and people who had supported them in their first year of teaching. The written response questionnaire also asked about how the school could support them better in their first year of teaching. Each written response was then discussed between pairs of beginning teachers who were audio recorded.

Ten out of 19 early-career teachers, who were employed after graduating from this smaller university campus with a Bachelor of Education degree, were selected purposefully for proximity and availability, and were emailed information about the research inviting them to participate in the study. After university ethics approval, and departmental and principals' approvals, all invitees provided consent and were released from teaching through the *Teacher Education Done Differently* (www.tedd.net.au) project to engage in the research at the university campus for a two and a half-hour period after three months of teaching. The first half an hour was assigned to completing the aforementioned survey and written response questionnaire, and the final time was dedicated to the interviews and focus group discussions. Audio recorders were used by participants to interview each other with semi-structured interview guidelines. These guidelines provided initial questions but also allowed for further questioning and probing.

The author and two other academics with sound research capabilities assisted in facilitating the interview environment. For example, while pairs of participants were randomly matched (and swapped three times within the timeframe), the researcher and academic assistants monitored the interviews, and asked probing questions when appropriate. Audio-recorded focus group discussions occurred at three points during the afternoon. All data were transcribed by a research assistant with a PhD. Qualitative data were analysed for emerging common themes (Creswell, 2012). In summary, the survey data presented the beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring experiences while the questionnaire and interview data provided more detailed responses on their perceptions of their challenges, achievements and needs for school support.

Results

Achievements

When asked to outline their greatest achievements so far this year (being three months into their first year), six out of ten participants focused strongly on behaviour management, among other achievements, for instance, “Starting my new job and still loving it, building positive relationships with my students, having a behaviour management plan down pat that works” (Participant 7). The participants’ main focus on achieving positive behaviour management was on individuals or small groups of students. Participant 9 wrote “improving the behaviour standards of some specific students within the class” while Participant 6 linked behaviour management in relation to surviving as a teacher: “Getting a handle on behaviour management (especially the language) working out how to teach grade 1, surviving at keeping on top of most things” (italics included). This is their first year of developing teacher-student relationships independently, which also is associated with effective behaviour management. Participant 10 claimed her greatest achievements were being passionate for teaching and developing positive teacher-student relationships: “I am enthusiastic and passionate everyday and I connect my students by listening to their needs”. She also emphasised her ability to establish a positive learning environment by providing “a bright stimulating classroom the students love coming to – they know they are welcome to come in and discuss anything with me”.

As achievements, five out of ten participants claimed they had established successful learning programs; some with emphasis on “improving the literacy and numeracy skills of my students – especially those that are refusing to work at the start of the year” (Participant 9) or “routines, spelling – root words/hands-on activities, community of learning/teamwork/behaviour” (Participant 8). Gathering an understanding of learning differentiation became an achievement for Participant 2: “Figuring out how to differentiate for and include all the students in the class by catering to their individual needs, behaviour management - individual strategies for individual students and positive relationships, being flexible and organised with reading groups”. Three participants (3, 6, & 9) claimed an achievement as “incorporating ICTs into my lessons in meaningful ways” (Participant 3). Another three beginning teachers wrote about “gaining the trust and respect of my students and staff” (Participant 1) and one wrote about staff support for survival: “working as part of a strong supportive team, getting through this term” (Participant 5). The notions of “getting through this term” and “surviving at keeping on top of most things” infer the overwhelming nature of being a beginning teacher. There were two participants who went beyond the classroom context, commenting about liaising with parents as an achievement, for example, “accomplishing parent-teacher interviews” (Participants 1 & 3). Table 1

outlines the achievements of these beginning teachers during their first three months of teaching.

Table 1. Beginning teachers' achievements and challenges

Activity	Achievements	Challenges
Securing a position	1, 7, 10	
Student achievements	10	1, 2, 7, 8, 9
Covering the curriculum		4, 6, 7, 8
Working as a team	1, 4, 5, 8	
Learning differentiation	2, 9, 10	4, 9
Surviving teaching	5, 6	5
Embedding ICT	3, 6, 9	
Behaviour management	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10
Building relationships and respect	1, 2, 4, 7, 10	2
Timetabling the curriculum	1, 3, 8	
Assessments and reporting	3	4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
Working with parents	1, 3	
Work-life balance		1, 3, 6, 7

NB: Numbers indicate the participant in the study

Challenges

Even though most of the participants claimed behaviour management as one of their greatest achievements, nine out of ten emphasised behaviour management as the greatest challenge they faced (Table 1). Five of the ten beginning teachers highlighted behaviour management with more than one student or they had phrased their comment around whole classroom management programs. Participant 4 was concerned about her "Behaviour management – I have a few high behaviour children who are not responding as well to my behaviour management system". Participant 3 found "dealing with extremely challenging kids that don't fit into the standard classroom behaviour plan" challenging while Participant 8 was challenged by "special-needs students' behaviour". Indeed, three participants focused on one student rather than whole class behaviour management issues, for instance: "Dealing with a student who can be quite defiant and bullies students openly but does not recognise it as bullying" (Participant 2). In some cases, the issue of managing students was not necessarily about their behaviour but rather the student learning. For instance, Participant 2 raised the challenge of having homework completed by the students "homework – students (majority) don't complete it – have tried many strategies rewards and detentions and vary the homework each week (asked the students when they preferred to have homework given out and due)". They clearly showed they were in training as new teachers in this initial period and their comments indicated their stage of development: "Implementing a 4 to 1 ratio of positive to negative behaviour reinforcement – it's still something that I have to train and remind myself to do" (Participant 3).

Beginning teachers indicated they were learning significantly during their first three months in a school, as although they had not had the full range of school experiences while studying at university, there can be many other activities required of the teacher during a school year. Yet, four participants (1, 3, 6, & 7) had outlined a need to create a personal-work life balance as a challenge: "Personal time management – haven't had a weekend for nine weeks" (Participant 7), and "balancing my work life with my social life particularly learning how to work smarter and not harder" (Participant 3). Indeed, the only participant who tried to create a work-life balance appeared to suffer from guilt, to illustrate: "knowing I might not be doing all I can for the kids in my class because I choose to put time aside for me and my family/friends" (Participant 6). Hence, understanding how to create a balance between the professional and personal life without feeling guilty may assist the beginning teacher in maintaining stamina for the profession rather than experiencing burn out early in their careers.

There were other challenges for these beginning teachers including working with school and national assessments, managing students with disabilities, and voicing opinions in staff forums. To illustrate, curriculum and other learning issues presented as challenges, as participants mentioned "NAPLAN [National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy] pressures" (Participants 4, 8, & 9) and "coping with assessments" (5, 10) while others stressed over "covering everything that needs to be covered for the term – there are so many concepts in the curriculum not enough time to teach them all in depth" (Participant 4). Two highlighted the challenges of providing appropriate learning for students with disabilities, for example: "Managing the learning of one of my students with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder]" (Participant 9). It should be noted that there are numerous disabilities, many of which would not be covered within either university coursework or professional school experiences that can confront beginning teachers in their new environments. Consequently, beginning teachers will require support with students who have disabilities, particularly as each case will be unique. Also some needed to develop confidence for speaking at various professional forums (e.g., school meetings): "speaking up in year level meetings – at first I didn't want to say much as I felt that my thoughts were not as good as the experienced teachers" (Participant 2).

Support from schools

These beginning teachers were asked how their schools had supported them to date. All had responded that their schools provided supportive environments through personal assistance, system assistance, resources, and programs. Although participants 3, 7 and 8 wanted more access to school resources, including the school's curriculum programs such as the Curriculum to Classroom (C2C) units, which is a Queensland Department of Education and

Training initiative that requires log in access to view units of work and lesson plans. Some were very enthusiastic about the level of personalised support they had received, case in point: “Loved me, specialist help, MET [Mentoring for Effective Teaching] mentors” (Participant 1). Four of the ten participants mentioned specifically that they had been involved in an eight-week induction program and assigned an experienced mentor teacher to assist their development. Several had identified multiple support staff in the school including “individual support staff – literacy coach/maths coach will come in and model lessons, weekly year level meetings, mentor teacher” (Participant 3; also Participants 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). Participant 7 added other staff as support such as “my team teacher is excellent, teacher aides, admin”. Participant 10 emphasised the support of a school executive who also encouraged her to seek views from other staff, to illustrate: the “deputy has told me to put up with no nonsense, call office! Talk as often as you need to, other teachers are extremely kind” (Participant 10). However, this option was not taken up by Participant 10 who wrote that she had received no mentoring support to date. Overall, participants agreed that the lead mentors or “juncture teachers [and a] really supportive team environment” (Participant 5) were considered crucial support measures.

When outlining their most supportive person for teaching during the first three months, four participants (2, 3, 5, & 6) wrote about the “teacher next door”, but also mainly focused on resources and professional knowledge as the main artefacts of support. The proximity of the support appeared essential to the everyday matters where these beginning teachers required assistance. Two participants (2 & 7) presented people not associated with the school as their most supportive person for teaching. To demonstrate: Participant 2, who also claimed the teacher next door was the most supportive, was married to a teacher and wrote about her “husband at home” providing support while Participant 7 may have written jokingly, “My mum - she has dinner for me every night - without her I’d starve”. Nevertheless, Participant 7 previously wrote about trying to create a work-life balance (“haven’t had a weekend for nine weeks”); consequently having time to prepare further school work at home while her mother cooks may well be a supportive mechanism for her to complete teaching preparation. Yet most mentioned a teacher as the most important support person, particularly if easily accessible: “My juncture teacher – I know I can approach her with anything and she will always help me” (Participant 5); however this may not necessarily be the most supportive arrangement. For instance, Participant 9 outlined that behaviour management was a key issue requiring support and so “My teacher aide supports me every day by working with specific students in learning and behaviour”. These comments suggested that beginning teachers draw upon various school staff to support them in the school.

Although beginning teachers suggested mentoring strategies that could help them at this stage of the year, nearly all strategies appeared on an individual needs basis. One mentioned “how to approach NAPLAN and general unit assessment” (Participant 2); however Participant 9 felt there was too much emphasis on NAPLAN and not enough on diagnostic tests, both of which are recognised assessments. Five participants suggested mentors model specific pedagogical practices to further support them. To illustrate: “modelling behaviour management of my difficult students, parent and teacher interactions, personal time management strategies” (Participant 4), “modelling (how to teach - new ideas)”, and “modelling of lessons such as guided reading, maths group rotations, functional grammar” (Participant 3). This modelling extended to: “Sharing examples of how to do things – parent/teacher interviews, assessment, behaviour” (Participant 5; also Participants 8 & 10). The one-off responses included a “best practice club” (Participant 7) and “observations on how I teach – what I do well and how to improve” (Participant 6). Participant 7’s best practices club is akin to establishing professional learning communities (Senge, 1990; Harris & Jones, 2010), where professionals can deliberate over effective practices. Such a club would provide opportunities to gain confidence in talking with other professionals and has the potential for developing leadership skills (Hudson, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2011).

Participant 6 wanted a mentor to “Tell me how I am doing (constructive feedback), what/how can I improve”. These beginning teachers are used to being observed when teaching and so to continue this practice in their first year of teaching may assist in building confidence, and may also lead towards developing a culture of sharing practices, which appears to be lacking with veteran teachers who tend to teach behind closed doors. Participant 6’s notion of being observed in the classroom arrives in the wake of continuous classroom observations as an undergraduate the previous year. Both suggestions can have considerable merit if managed effectively. These participants provided further suggestions that would support them at a school level. Two wanted ICT support, two wanted behaviour management support, and two needed more planning time. In addition, two wanted an assigned mentor to discuss their teaching: “Give me a specific mentor that I could talk to about my teaching” (Participant 9; also Participant 10).

These beginning teachers completed a five-part Likert scale survey that focused on a five factor model for mentoring. They recorded responses according to their mentors’ attributes and practices associated with the model of mentoring. Tables 2-6 show descriptive statistics with agree and strongly agree responses. Ninety percent agreed that their mentors were supportive, comfortable in talking about teaching, and instilled confidence for teaching, while half the beginning teachers agreed that their mentors assisted in their reflection on teaching practices (Table 2). Eighty percent recorded that their

mentors outlined school policies, however only 60% discussed the aims and curriculum for teaching (Table 3). The high standard deviations on all items across all tables indicated significant variability in their perceptions of the mentoring they received.

Table 2: Personal attributes for mentoring beginning teachers

Mentoring Practices	%*	*M*	*SD*
Comfortable talking	90	4.50	1.27
Supportive	90	4.20	1.23
Instilled confidence	90	4.10	1.20
Instilled positive attitudes	80	4.00	1.41
Attentive listening	70	4.00	1.33
Assisted in reflecting	50	3.40	1.27

* Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 3: System requirements for mentoring beginning teachers

Mentoring Practices	% *	*M*	*SD*
Discussed policies	80	4.10	1.29
Outlined curriculum	60	3.50	1.43
Discussed aims	60	3.30	1.34

* Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

As teaching and learning is the core business of education, these beginning teachers indicated the level of mentoring of pedagogical knowledge for the teaching. Eighty percent agreed their mentors assisted them with teaching strategies while 70% assisted with problem solving and classroom management. They claimed that 60% guided their teaching preparation and implementation with only 50% who discussed planning, content knowledge, and assessment (Table 4). These beginning teachers highlighted their mentors displayed enthusiasm (90%), syllabus language (80%), and modelling a rapport with students (80%; Table 5). It also provided an indication of the opportunities these beginning teachers had in observing their mentors' teaching practices with 70% claiming they had observed effective teaching, classroom management, and hands-on lessons by their mentors.

Finally, the beginning teachers indicated the feedback provided by their mentors with 80% agreeing their mentors provided oral feedback but only 20% with written feedback (Table 6). Only half claimed their mentors articulated expectations for teaching or observed them teaching in order to provide feedback. The standard deviations indicated considerable variability between responses, suggesting that the quality of mentoring may be variable. It was possible that some mentor teachers may have recognised that particular beginning teachers required no assistance in certain areas. Despite most schools requiring teaching plans (programs) are made available for scrutiny, these plans may have been reviewed by a school executive and not necessarily

an assigned mentor. Similarly, an assigned mentor may not be allocated responsibility for articulating expectations to the beginning teacher; instead such responsibility may reside with a school executive. Indeed, this may well be the case for other items on this survey.

Table 4: Pedagogical knowledge for mentoring beginning teachers

Mentoring Practices	% *	*M*	*SD*
Assisted with teaching strategies	80	3.80	1.14
Discussed problem solving	70	3.80	1.23
Assisted with classroom management	70	3.60	1.65
Discussed implementation	60	3.60	1.35
Guided preparation	60	3.50	1.43
Assisted with timetabling	60	3.40	1.71
Assisted in planning	50	3.30	1.49
Provided viewpoints	50	3.30	1.42
Discussed assessment	50	3.30	1.34
Discussed content knowledge	50	3.10	1.29
Discussed questioning techniques	40	2.80	1.87

* Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 5: Modelling for mentoring beginning teachers

Mentoring Practices	% *	*M*	*SD*
Displayed enthusiasm	90	4.40	1.27
Modelled rapport with students	80	3.90	1.37
Used syllabus language	80	3.90	1.20
Modelled effective teaching	70	3.90	1.45
Modelled classroom management	70	3.60	1.65
Demonstrated hands-on	70	3.50	1.43
Modelled teaching	60	3.40	1.58
Modelled a well-designed lesson	60	3.20	1.75

* Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 6: Feedback for mentoring beginning teachers

Mentoring Practices	%*	*M*	*SD*
Provided oral feedback	80	4.10	1.29
Provided evaluation on teaching	70	3.40	1.27
Articulated expectations	50	3.10	1.52
Observed teaching for feedback	50	2.90	1.73
Reviewed teaching plans	30	2.20	1.55
Provided written feedback	20	2.10	1.20

* Percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed.

The beginning teachers wrote about the level of support from the school, which varied in terms of frequency in communicating with mentors and school staff directly related to their teaching practices. During the space of a week, two participants claimed they only spoke 1-5 times, while five participants claimed they communicated with their mentors and school staff about their teaching between 6-10 times; one indicated 11-20 times and two claimed they interacted with others about their teaching more than 20 times. All but one beginning teacher (Participant 10) felt they had a good rapport with their mentors and were well supported. Participant 2's response was largely representative of all the other responses: "Yes, I feel I can talk openly about my teaching and experiences to other teachers and they respond to me with advice and their experiences". All participants felt they were part of the school teaching team, including Participant 10 who wrote, "I feel I belong there". Participant 4's response was indicative of other comments: "I feel accepted as part of the year level team and other staff make an effort to touch base with me". However, it was also noted that some could sense tensions between staff: "I feel part of the team although divides within staff/admin/support I felt indirectly" (Participant 3).

Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated how schools support beginning teachers and how this support could be enhanced in their new educational environments. Figure 1 presents a summary of the key findings in this study, which includes learning how to manage and network with people. The beginning teachers in this study were focused on varied aspects of teaching and learning but also spoke frequently on induction about the school culture and infrastructure. They noted in their responses broad and specific teaching practices that could advance their assimilation into the new educational environment, noted in other studies (e.g., Beck, Kosnik, & Rowsell, 2007), which also includes classroom management and access to resources (see also Bezzina, 2006: Marable & Raimondi, 2007; Parker, 2010).

It appeared that the beginning teachers' key issues focused on: managing student behaviour and creating a work-life balance, in which resilience strategies needed to be part of the preservice teacher development (see also Keogh et al., 2010; Hudson, 2012), including problem-solving techniques, and ways to manage people within the work environment (e.g., Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). Creating a work-life balance can be difficult for those new into teaching positions; hence their workloads need to be monitored. Experienced staff can provide strategies they have developed to create this balance to ensure the level of engagement in work maintains at a quality standard and that beginning teachers do not begin to feel overworked with little recreation to alleviate the pressures.

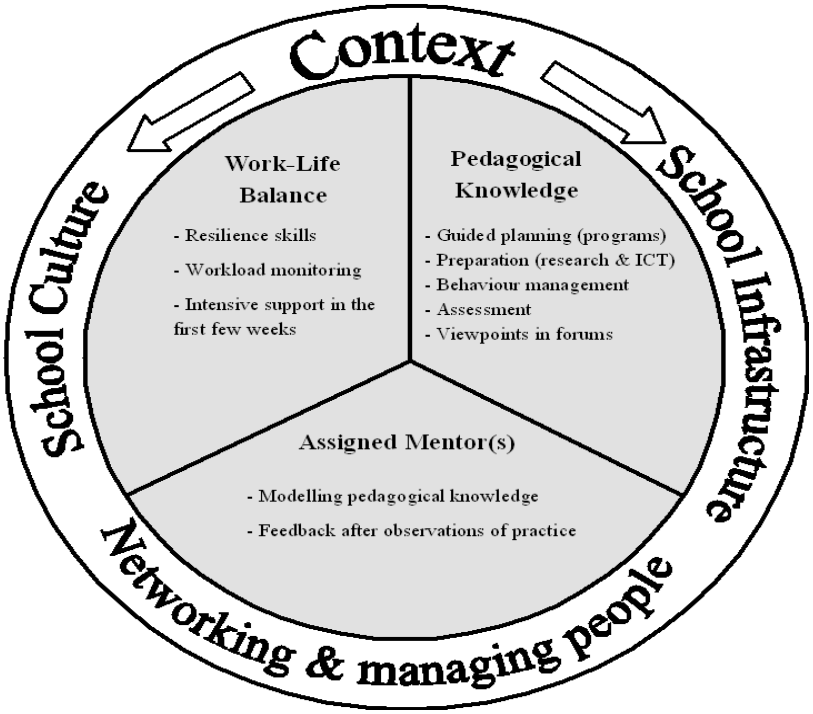

Figure 1. Advancing support for beginning teachers

During a four-year Bachelor of Education program, preservice teachers are engaged in learning about current teaching practices within the university setting and spend about one fifth of the coursework in schools. Every school context is different, particularly with the economic-socio status, geographical location, population input, and the school-community culture. Preservice teachers are placed in schools where they need to learn about these contexts along with staff social dynamics, individual student needs, and specific school policies and procedures. It would be unrealistic to expect preservice teachers to graduate with these experiences that require contextually-specific knowledge and skills without further assistance and guidance from schools. Within these contexts, assigned mentors can assist beginning teachers by modelling practices and providing feedback on the beginning teachers' planning, preparation, behaviour management and assessment as indicated by the data (Figure 1).

The survey used in this study provided tentative results only, as more qualitative data were needed to determine how the survey applied to the beginning teachers. Nevertheless, it highlighted the perceived mentoring experiences the beginning teachers received in their first year, which may help to understand how to more effectively target the mentoring of beginning teachers. Evidence from a US study (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007) found that beginning teachers wanted more guidance in their teaching with observations of teaching practice as part of their development as

early-career teachers. It was clear in this study that the beginning teachers wanted more supportive environments with willing and compatible mentors who can effectively guide their practices. They claimed the support was essential in the first few weeks of the school year with continued support at various points during the year to assist their understanding of new situations (see also Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011). The mentoring of beginning teachers must include the school culture and infrastructure but should focus very clearly on the core business of education, that is, teaching and student learning. Thus, mentoring for effective teaching must be central for assisting beginning teachers into their new educational environments (see also Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2008). Beginning teachers need more experienced personnel to address some of these challenges by providing timely support and guidance, such as key assessments and pertinent school policies.

As indicated in this study and others (e.g., Kardos & Johnson, 2010), the mentoring of beginning teachers can be inequitable. Carefully selecting trained and willing mentors are needed to provide positive support and aid teacher retention rates (Martin et al., 2009). This also has implications for education systems and partnering universities who need to step up to the plate for delivering mentor education programs underpinned by theory and research about effective mentoring practices (e.g., Hudson & Hudson, 2011). For teaching, school staff can assist beginning teachers into the profession by providing on-going support, where challenges and problems are tackled through positive and constructive avenues, such as regular mentor-mentee meetings, mentor modelling of practices, observation of the beginning teacher's practices, and inclusion of a range of staff who can provide specific information to guide the beginning teacher in a timely fashion.

This study was limited with the number of participants and the geographic location; therefore it may be difficult to make generalisations beyond these immediate contexts. Nevertheless, this study comprised of about half those who secured teaching positions after graduating from this campus, and many of the findings in this study appear synonymous with other research studies that indicate applicability elsewhere. A much larger study that includes more participants from more Australian states may provide further evidence on how to support beginning teachers in specific contexts. More research is needed on understanding how mentoring beginning teachers affects teaching practice and student achievement using a range of data sources, including self-reported measures, theoretical frameworks on teaching and learning, and student learning outcomes (see also Wang, Odell, & Schwill, 2008).

This current study supports others (Blair, 2008; Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Martin et al., 2009) in advocating that a community of willing, capable, and compatible mentors with diverse expertise and vantage points can provide richer and more productive mentoring experiences for beginning

teachers. Beginning teachers need a community of mentors who can collaborate on building the profession at the beginning teacher level with clear indications on who, what, how and when to support them in their practices, which also indicates further research directions. Most importantly, it is essential to have timely induction and mentoring for effective teaching, as beginning teachers continue to articulate the need for ongoing support within their schools and unique classroom contexts.

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