An Evaluation of the University of Idaho Beginning Agriculture Teacher Induction Program

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According to Schulman (1987), teaching may well be the most difficult of all professions to master. It is one of the few professions that expects the first-year teacher to immediately perform at the same level as his or her experienced colleagues. These expectations, however unfair. do have validity in the fact that the students of a first-year teacher deserve a quality education. Keeping thii in mind, how can these new teachers be helped so they can provide a good, solid education for their students while functioning in a new environment of school politics and social structure. In recent years, the answer to this complex question has been to provide some form of beginning teacher induction or assistance program. This assistance has ranged from informal friendships to very formal and structured programs. No matter what type of program has been adopted, they have all been initiated for the reason that new teachers need help.

New agriculture teachers especially need this help. Scott (1988) believes one of the most critical issues facing agriculture teacher educators is how to provide an induction program that will reduce the many problems confronting first-year teachers. These new agriculture teachers are not only responsible for the activities of a normal subject teacher, such as classroom management and subject content, but they are also responsible for an entire program of vocational education.

In order to meet this need faced by beginning agriculture teachers, the University of Idaho Department of Agricultural and Extension Education has initiated and has administered a first-year teacher induction program for beginning agriculture teachers in Idaho since the fall of 1985. Since implementation, no formal assessment or evaluation of the program has been conducted.

The purpose of the program has been to provide leadership, technical assistance. and support in the transition from student to first-year teacher. Specific objectives of the program include:

> Assist with the continued development of effective pedagogical skills into habits of practice in the first-year teacher's classroom.
>
> Assist in the development of vocational program operation and effectiveness to include assistance with: curriculum scope and sequence, program philosophy, goals and objectives, FFA program of activities, annual and long-range plans, and utilization of advisory committees.

The structure of the induction program has included three components. First, individual on-site consultations have occurred two to three times during the school year. A teacher educator has visited each beginning teacher in their school to observe teaching,

discuss classroom management, listen, support, give advice, and solve problems in diverse areas. A written summary of the on-site consultation has been provided to the beginning teacher and the building principal. The summary has included observations, commendations, and recommendations concerning the day's visit.

Second, seminars have *been* conducted for beginning secondary agriculture teachers. The one- and one-half day seminars have been held in a quiet setting away from the school environment. Participants have been given the opportunity to share and exchange ideas and discuss problems and issues in a nonthreatening manner. Professionals have been invited to address issues dealing with time management, classroom management, student motivation, learning styles, students in crises, and creative teaching ideas. The state supervisor of agricultural education has discussed topics such as: the FFA organization, funding, state forms, program evaluations, and other pertinent topics.

Third, beginning teachers have had the opportunity to enroll for university credit. Beginning teachers have completed assignments related to the vocational program and the experience of the first-year teacher. Assignments have included: development of scope and sequence of instruction, an assessment of facility layout and organization, completion of FFA program of activities, developing and maintaining effective instructor-administrator relations, improving student motivation, classroom management strategies, and developing a local program, philosophy, goals, and objectives.

Teacher induction programs have only recently reached a position of priority. According to Jensen (1987), because induction programs are relatively new, few are described in the literature and even fewer have been evaluated. Heath-Camp et al. (1992). indicate that little research has been done in vocational education relating to teacher induction. Most of the teacher induction literature is directed to elementary and general secondary education. Heath-Camp and **Camp** (1990) report that insufficient literature is available regarding the induction process for beginning vocational teachers and especially for those teachers entering the profession with certification based on occupational experience, rather than teacher education degree programs. A study, completed by Waters and Yoder (1986), researched the impact of the induction program administered by the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Pennsylvania State University for its first-year teachers. Results of the study indicated that participation did not significantly enhance teachers' level **of** job satisfaction. Continued evaluation is essential in gaining information about the needs of beginning teachers and the value of beginning teacher induction or assistance programs.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to conduct an evaluation of the beginning teacher induction program as administered by the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Idaho. The following research questions were identified and utilized:

> What value and/or benefit was received from participation in the induction program by the teacher and administrator?

What were the perceptions and/or attitudes of teachers versus principals toward the induction program?

What were the positive points of the induction program?

Methods and Procedures

The study was descriptive using a self-administered mail questionnaire. The population consisted of two groups. Group one included all 50 agriculture teachers who participated in the induction program from 1985-86 to 1990-91. Group two included all 40 principals or supervisors of program participants. The reason for the difference in the number of teachers and the number of principals was that over the period of six years the induction program was in place, several of the principals had more than one beginning teacher. This was due to teachers moving or leaving the field of education.

Two instruments were developed by the researcher and field tested by vice-principals, former agriculture teachers, and experienced English teachers. One instrument was developed for program principals and another for fist-year teachers. The final teacher perceptions instrument consisted of 16 questions and the final principal perceptions instrument consisted of 14 questions. Thirteen of the questions were common to both instruments. Questions were developed to answer the three questions stated in the purpose of the study. The format used in both instruments included a Likert-type scale, yes/no, ranking, and open-ended completion questions.

The instrument was mailed to all teachers and principles and appropriate follow-up contacts made to the nonrespondents. Instruments were returned by 37 or the 50 teachers (74%) and 34 of the 40 principals (85%) for a total return of 78.9%. Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions and frequency of response were utilized in the analysis of the data. The open-ended questions provided qualitative data that were grouped into similar categories. Judgments were made by the researcher based on similarities in responses. Each category which evolved from this process was then coded with a number for data entry and analysis.

Findings

Four procedures were primarily used to deliver the induction program: 1) on-site visits/consultations, 2) beginning teacher seminars, 3) program related assignments. and 4) a written summary narrative of the on-site visits provided to both the teacher and principal. The respondents were asked to respond on a Likert-type scale as to their agreement or disagreement to the statements in Table 1. The majority of responses were positive with most responses in the “tend to agree” and the “agree” categories. The principals appeared to be slightly more positive as demonstrated by more responses in the agree category than the teachers.

Table 2 presents responses from participants that dealt with some of the intangible benefits of the induction program. Table 2 indicates the responses again to be positive with a majority of responses in the agree category. In areas of developing relationships with university resource personnel and time spent with the program coordinator, the

principals' responses were again slightly more positive than the teachers'. In the areas of moral support and nonjudgmental constructive criticism, the teachers were positive with a majority of responses in the agree category.

Table 1. Degree of Respondent Agreement Selected Program Activities

Question		Frequency Distribution							
		Disagree		Tend to Disagree		Tend to Agree		Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of on-site visits were adequate	T[b]	3	8.1	4	10.8	16	43.3	14	37.8
	P[c]	1	2.9	2	5.9	13	38.2	16	47.1
Seminars attended were beneficial	T	1	2.7	3	8.1	11	29.7	21	56.8
Written narrative of the on-site visit/consultation was beneficial	T	3	8.1	2	5.4	13	35.1	18	48.7
	P	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	26.5	22	64.7
Needs as a first-year teacher were identified	T	2	5.4	4	10.8	15	40.5	16	43.3
Assignments given were relevant to your situation	T	1	2.7	2	5.4	13	35.1	21	56.8
Program was beneficial to me as a principal	P	0	0.0	1	2.9	14	41.2	17	50.0

a= Nonrespondents per question ranged from 0 to 3.T[b]=Teacher (N=37), P[c]=Principal (N=34), T= question only asked of teachers, P=question asked only of principals.

The respondents were asked to rank the four procedures used to deliver the induction program. The on-site visit was ranked first by 18 principals and 21 teachers. The written follow-up narrative was ranked last by both teachers and principals among the four items.

Respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question dealing with the perceived value of the on-site visit. Responses were grouped based on similarity of response and are presented in Table 4. The majority of the responses fell within three categories of direct immediate expert help, moral support and encouragement, and constructive criticism. The respondents felt that having someone to talk to directly about their own individual program was a tremendous benefit.

Another open-ended question dealt with the long-term effect the induction program had on the teacher's career and the program. Responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 2. Extent to Which Induction Program was Helpful in Selected Intangible Areas

		Frequency Distribution							
		Disagree		Tend to Disagree		Tend to Agree		Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Encouragement	T[b]	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	29.7	26	70.3
	P[c]	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	26.5	23	67.6
Moral Support	T	3	8.1	3	8.1	11	29.7	20	54.1
	P	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	29.4	21	61.8
Non-judgmental constructive	T	2	5.4	3	8.1	13	35.1	19	51.4
criticism	P	0	0.0	1	2.9	15	44.1	16	47.1
Developing relationships with university									
resource	T	3	8.1	5	13.5	15	40.6	14	37.8
personnel	P	0	0.0	1	2.9	11	32.4	20	58.8
Time spent with									
program	T	2	5.4	6	16.2	14	37.8	15	40.6
coordinator	P	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	35.3	20	58.8

[a]=Nonrespondents per area ranged from 0 to 3. T[b]=Teacher (N=37). P[b]= Principal (N=34).

Table 3. Ranking of Induction Program Delivery Procedures

	Rank	
Procedure	Teachers	Principals
On-site visit	1	1
Seminars	2 tie	2
Assignments	2 tie	3
Written narrative	4	4

1 - most beneficial to 4 - least beneficial.

Table 4. Value of On-site Visit/Consultation.

	Frequency of Responses	
Response category*	Teachers	Principals
Direct immediate expert help	28	21
Constructive criticism	8	0
Reinforced administration perceptions	1	4
Moral support and encouragement	12	4
Helped administration to understand program		5
All other responses	4	2
No response to question	2	6

*All responses were categorized into the above areas. Some respondents gave more than one answer to the above question.

Responses were grouped according to similarity of response. Respondents believed the program helped them set long-term goals for their program, helped in starting a strong program foundation from which to build toward the future, and the induction program simply gave them the moral support and encouragement needed to do the best they could.

Table 5. Perceptions of Induction Program on Short-term and Long-term Career and Program.

	Frequency of Responses	
Response category*	Teachers	Principals
Helped set long-term goals	12	9
Encouragement and moral support	9	6
Identified weak program areas	3	6
Started strong program foundation	10	2
Program has university support when needed	1	4
Motivated teacher	0	2
Faster program improvement	4	2
All other responses	2	4
No response to the question	5	10

*All responses were categorized into the above areas. Some respondents gave more than one answer to the above question.

Respondents were asked how long they believed an induction program should last. Response categories included from one to five years. A large majority of both teachers and principals believed that the program should last two years.

Table 6. Length of an Induction Program.

	Freauency Distribution				
Respondent Group	1 yr.	2 yrs.	3 yrs.	4 yrs.	5 yrs.
Teacher	12	22	3	0	0
Principal	4	24	6	0	0

Teachers (N=37), Principals (N=34).

Teachers were asked whether they viewed the program as an evaluation or as a helpful tool. By a large majority, the teachers indicated they viewed the program as a helpful tool.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to conduct an evaluation of the beginning teacher induction program as administered by the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Idaho. Overall, the responses of this evaluative study were positive. The direct face-to-face interaction with the program coordinator during the on-site visits appeared to have great value to both teachers and principals. Although the on-site visits ranked first among both respondent groups, the seminars, assignments, and the written narrative were indicated from the study to also have value and benefit. The perceived value of the on-site visit indicated that quality time on-site with beginning

teachers was important and appreciated. In addition, the university relationship fostered and developed with the beginning teacher and the school, in general, appears to be perceived as mutually helpful and valuable. The respondents indicated the program, overall, assisted teachers in establishing long-term goals and in laying a foundation on which they could build in future years. The encouragement, moral support, and nonjudgmental constructive criticism were of great value to the beginning teachers. Generally, principals and teachers agreed as to the value and benefit of the program. The induction program was viewed as a helpful tool and not an evaluation by the beginning teachers.

A majority of the respondents believed that the program should continue for at least two years. The study gives strong impetus that the program should continue and be expanded to continue for two years.

Implications

First-year teachers have always needed help. The practice of teacher education has been abandonment. It is only recently that teacher induction and assistance programs have received a different priority. A changing society and the reform and restructuring of education gives added impetus to the need for continued effort in first-year assistance programs. The one-on-one on-site visitation provides a context for mutual understanding of the difficulty of the task. Beginning teacher induction programs require sizeable investments of resources. As a result of that investment, the connection between the university and teachers in first practice is strengthened. First-year teachers perceive the university as caring about them beyond the institutional door and as a result, the profession as a whole benefit.

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