

# Introduction

The first day was scary because you turn up and you see all these smiling faces and the odd parent who has come to see. You look around and there is no associate teacher<sup>1</sup> to call back-up on. You're *it*, and that's when it hits home because coming in early and setting the class up, that was all cool, but when they were all sitting there looking at you saying, 'Right, teach us!' you're going, 'It's me now', and that was cool. (Robert, middle school teacher, aged 27)

## **Reality shock: Why the early days of teaching are so challenging**

Robert's experience as a beginning teacher was typical. He was both scared and excited. Now that he was no longer a student teacher he had no associate teacher to "call backup on" if things fell apart. He was on his own with a bunch of 12-year-olds.

Unlike other professionals, beginning teachers enter their workplaces with much the same responsibilities and expectations as their more experienced colleagues. There is no warm up or transition period—school starts and teachers are *on*. Regardless of how well their teacher education programmes have prepared them for their new responsibilities, or how successful they were in previous careers, the first few weeks and months of teaching are universally challenging for all new teachers.

Beginning teachers usually enter teaching with high ideals, typically saying they chose teaching because they want to "make a difference" to children's lives and learning. They are well aware that walking into their own classroom for the first time is a momentous occasion. They want desperately to be the kind of

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<sup>1</sup> An associate teacher has a role in mentoring student teachers in addition to his/her role as a classroom teacher.

teacher that children and young people will warm to, enjoy and learn from. But for most people, being the teacher they want to be is not straightforward or easy. Their success depends on a combination of factors, including school expectations, decisions their employers make about the nature of their work, the resources they have available to them and the relationships they have with their colleagues, all of which interact with the qualities of the teachers themselves. But the most pressing need for a beginning teacher is to make sense of, and survive, the immediate challenges in their classroom.

One of the reasons for this challenge is that every decision (and there are many to make every day) is a new decision. For the first time in their lives new teachers have a major responsibility for decisions about setting up their classrooms, planning teaching programmes, deciding on expectations and routines, at the same time as getting to know their students and their colleagues, and interacting with parents. Juggling all these responsibilities requires them to integrate different kinds of knowledge, which beginners find hard to do. New teachers also find it hard to prioritise which things to do first.

All these simultaneous challenges can make a new teacher's head hurt. And in the back of a beginning teacher's mind is the awareness that things could go horribly wrong. Every teacher knows, from their memories of their own schooling, that lurking under the surface is the potential for chaos. As a result, the first few weeks of teaching are often physically exhausting and emotionally challenging. It is important that new teachers and their classes get off to a good start, so that the "business" of learning (for both teachers and students) gets underway from the first day and beginning teachers begin to feel a sense of satisfaction in their work.

McNally and his colleagues have explored the early days of teaching in their research and have come up with seven dimensions of professional learning for new teachers (McNally et al., 2008). These are summarised in Table 1.

Although these dimensions are constant throughout early teaching, and probably throughout a teacher's career, the material, emotional and relational dimensions preoccupy teachers when they first begin teaching. Teachers in our study were anxious to be doing the right things with their students and to be seen to be doing the right things by their colleagues, students and students' parents: they wanted to be accepted as a colleague and as a teacher. Beginning teachers were particularly worried about their relationships with parents and about "being professional". Different dimensions will preoccupy teachers at different times, depending on

**Table 1 The seven dimensions of early professional learning**

<p><b>Emotional:</b> the range and intensity of feelings, from anxiety and despair to delight and fulfilment, that permeate the new teachers' descriptions of their learning experiences.</p> <p><b>Relational:</b> the set of social interactions, mainly with pupils and colleagues, which produce the relationships crucial and central to the new teachers' professional identity and role.</p> <p><b>Structural:</b> the organisational aspects of the school itself and the wider educational system, including roles, rules and procedures that govern not only teachers' entry into the profession but also the idea of education within society.</p> <p><b>Material:</b> structural aspects as reflected in resources, rooms etc. as they apply to new teachers.</p> <p><b>Cognitive:</b> the explicit understanding that tends to be applied in professional practice (e.g., curriculum knowledge, assessment techniques, differentiated teaching), which includes the professional standard.</p> <p><b>Ethical:</b> the new teachers' expressed sense (explicit and implicit) of commitment and care as purposive.</p> <p><b>Temporal:</b> all of the dimensions change in terms of how they are thought about and experienced over time.</p>
Source: McNally et al. (2008)

what is going on for them in their lives, both inside and outside school. Knowing about, and attending to, these dimensions can prevent beginning teachers from becoming overwhelmed by the demands of teaching, and help to build confidence and satisfaction in their work.

### **Reducing reality shock**

The characteristics teachers bring to their first teaching positions interact with conditions in their workplaces and affect how they manage the “reality shock”. One key factor in reducing the reality shock is other colleagues. Colleagues play a hugely significant role in the lives of beginning teachers. McNally et al. (2008) found that as much as 41 percent of the variation in new teachers' overall job satisfaction is attributable to working relationships with colleagues in their departments. An initially confident teacher can have her confidence shattered by a mentor teacher<sup>2</sup> or supervising teacher who constantly criticises everything she attempts to do; an

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2 A mentor teacher (sometimes called a tutor teacher) is a teacher with designated responsibility for assisting a beginning teacher to meet the profession's criteria for full registration.

anxious beginning teacher can be buoyed by friendly colleagues who make a point of noticing her achievements and offering support. The eager-to-please teacher risks burnout if no one notices that he spends all of his lunch hours and most of Saturday coaching sports, and is the last out the door each day. Barrie, a primary school teacher in our study who overworked in his first year, would have benefited from colleagues who reined in his tendency to volunteer for additional tasks. He recalls, “I put my hand up for everything. At the same time I desperately wanted to fit in, was anxious and didn’t want to do anything that would ruffle any feathers.”

### **Induction: Supporting early professional learning**

Induction is a planned process that addresses the key dimensions of early professional learning and supports teachers to meet the criteria for full teacher registration. Induction programmes provide guided learning opportunities to enable beginning teachers to:

- gain local knowledge of students, curriculum and the school context
- design responsive curriculum and instruction
- enact and build their teaching repertoire in purposeful ways
- create a classroom learning community
- develop a professional identity
- learn in and from practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

This book aims to help schools develop and implement strong induction processes that support the professional learning of beginning teachers and nurture them as individuals. Induction requires more than a beginning-of-the-year introduction to the school; it is a developmental process that involves several components, each of which comprises a chapter in this book.

#### **Why does induction matter?**

##### *Building good habits*

Starting teaching puts the new teacher into an environment where they have never been before. Teachers can’t help but learn in this new environment, but without support they may not build the habits that will help them become good teachers. The attitudes, habits and sense of teacher identity that form in the early years of teaching can set the pattern for the kind of teacher they become throughout their careers. Trial and error learning is not the best way for teachers to learn. If new teachers are left alone to find their own way, all they have to rely on is their own

limited experience from their initial teacher education and the volumes of experience from their own time as students in schools. Without induction they can get locked into a survival mentality, and react to what they judge to be the most pressing issues in their classrooms, such as the need to have a quiet class. Under pressure they are likely to rely on a limited range of teaching methods that appear to work in the short term. Unless we want to replicate—at random—the experiences of the past and of this kind of crisis mode, these teachers need to be supported to build habits that support children’s learning and their emerging identities as teachers.

### *Student learning*

Writers such as Claxton (2002) and Gilbert (2005) emphasise that the new century requires new conceptions of knowledge, which in turn require different approaches to learning and teaching. Claxton emphasises that teachers need to help students develop “learning power”, so that they become good at learning, not just good at passing examinations. In his view, being good at learning requires young people to develop attributes such as perseverance, curiosity, self-knowledge and collaboration. Gilbert talks about the “new and different ways of thinking” (p. 10) that are now important in the 21st century. There is no value in preparing young people to live in a world that no longer exists. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) also requires new ways of thinking and learning. Induction programmes can help beginning teachers to emphasise students’ learning dispositions and habits that will serve them well in their futures. Students benefit from energised and capable teachers who enjoy their work and are developing into thoughtful and committed professionals.

### *Teacher learning*

Strong induction programmes can build teachers’ understanding of how to support the learning of students in their classrooms. Although new teachers bring knowledge and understanding about curriculum, assessment and teaching approaches from their initial teacher education, they have to learn how to use this knowledge in ways that work for the particular individuals and groups they teach. Induction programmes can help them to analyse their students’ learning and figure out how to tailor their teaching to their specific interests and needs. It can encourage them to be curious about how children and young people learn and how different teaching approaches can support their learning. It can give them the confidence to reach out beyond their current knowledge to increase their understanding and

teaching repertoire through professional reading, observing others and learning to talk about their teaching with their colleagues.

### *Mentors and workplaces*

As well as offering benefits to students and beginning teachers, the process of induction has potential benefits for mentor teachers and schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Teachers who work alongside beginning teachers value their enthusiasm, energy and up-to-date curriculum knowledge, and their own practice benefits from thinking more deeply about their own teaching. Mentors can also develop new skills, because supporting other teachers to develop expertise requires them to develop new skill sets, and teachers are energised by learning new skills.

There is the potential for workplaces to be transformed when teachers work together to support beginning teachers. Overall school capability can grow when teachers collaborate about teaching and learning. School leaders tend to overlook the long-term pay-offs from investing in expansive induction programmes, but a reputation for providing great induction programmes can be a drawcard for attracting the sorts of teachers schools want.

### *Reducing teacher turnover*

Another reason for putting effort into teacher induction is that well supported beginning teachers are much more likely to stay and contribute to their schools. There is a growing demand for capable teachers. The kinds of people that principals say they require to meet the needs of the new generation of learners have many more alternative career options than the previous generation of teachers, and teaching is not seen as a high-status career (Kane & Mallon, 2006). Even when schools are able to attract promising new teachers it can be a challenge to keep them sufficiently interested and committed so that they are not lost to other schools or other careers. New teacher attrition is a problem in many countries, and New Zealand is no better at keeping new teachers than school systems in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. Despite having the best funding for teacher induction anywhere in the world, 37 percent of new teachers in New Zealand leave teaching within the first three years (Elvidge, 2002). Some do return, often after overseas travel, but too many are lost to the profession forever.

While these new teachers are leaving the profession, experienced teachers are retiring. As in many other countries the average age of teachers is increasing: in New Zealand it is around 45 years, and almost 40 percent of New Zealand secondary

teachers are aged 50 years and over. Only 15 percent of secondary teachers are under 30 (Engler, 2007). Given the combination of a significant number of teachers leaving the profession every year and an increasing number retiring, it is important that we do our best to attract and keep capable teachers.

It should come as no surprise that schools that neglect their teachers are likely to lose them. Some teacher turnover is inevitable, but schools that invest in their teachers are more likely to keep them, contributing to a stable staff and school culture. As is evident from Robert's example (and others I will tell you about), schools that invest in their newest teachers help to create the sorts of teachers they need for their students and their communities. Attracting and keeping new teachers is a function of the same basic set of principles: to create contexts and work conditions that make the jobs and lives of new teachers as rewarding as possible, and that support them in their professional learning.

### **Beginning teacher induction: Whose responsibility?**

The major responsibility for beginning teacher induction lies with each workplace. The first two years of teaching comprise the period of induction—the time when the foundations for becoming a full member of the profession are established. Teachers are required to meet a set of criteria, called the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions, before they are awarded full registration.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Education provides schools with comparatively generous funding to enable them to provide induction programmes. Each school employing a beginning teacher receives an additional 0.2 salary allowance (around \$9,000) for a teacher's first year and 0.1 for the second year to support their achievement of the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions.

Primary schools have a great deal of flexibility in how they use this funding. They frequently use a proportion of it to release beginning teachers to observe other teachers, attend support groups, and reflect on and document their learning, as well as allocating some funding to release mentor teachers to observe and provide feedback to beginning teachers. In secondary schools the funding is used to provide noncontact time for the beginning teacher, with no time available to mentors or supervising teachers. Recent research on how schools use induction funding (Anthony & Kane, 2008; Cameron, Dingle, & Brooking, 2007) indicates that many

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3 From 2010 beginning teachers will be required to meet the Teachers Council draft Registered Teacher Criteria; see <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/policy/projects2.stm>

schools do not use it well, but there are no indications of why this is so. It could be that some school leaders are not aware of the importance of support in the first two years, or they may have so many competing needs that they favour other priorities. Some school leaders would like to do more for their beginning teachers but need support themselves in how to do this effectively. We hope this book will help.

Although the onus is primarily on school leaders to provide the working conditions to develop beginning teachers throughout their induction period, a school commitment to induction is likely to lead to longer term improvements in teacher and student learning. Loyalty, motivation and commitment flourish in supportive work cultures where teachers and students thrive. Overall school capability grows as experienced teachers contribute to the professional learning in the school and develop the knowledge and skills to encourage and support new teachers.

### **The research behind this book**

The demand for good teachers has created interest in research about the current generation of teachers now entering the profession. Research by a team from Harvard University on 50 new Massachusetts teachers (Johnson, 2004) shows that they had very different expectations from previous generations of teachers, who tended to decide to teach as a first career and then teach for their whole careers. In the Harvard study, the researchers found that many people entered teaching having worked in other occupations, and some saw teaching as a short-term occupation before moving on to other careers. Others thought they would try teaching for a while and see how it turned out. Their commitment to teaching was tentative at best. After two years in the Harvard study, 11 of the 50 teachers had left teaching altogether, and only 28 were still teaching in their original schools. There were many reasons for these teachers' career decisions, including salary, how well they were prepared for teaching and their personal circumstances, but the things that really mattered were an orderly school environment, a principal who listened to them, opportunities to participate with their colleagues and the quality of the curriculum and pedagogical support they received in their schools.

We were interested in learning more about the experiences of new teachers in New Zealand, so we decided to explore the experiences of a group of teachers in this country. The context in New Zealand is obviously very different from Massachusetts and we wanted to see whether those differences changed what was most important for new teachers. We were also interested not just in any teachers but in the most



promising, the ones teacher educators and principals said they want to keep in the profession. We decided to select teachers for our study who had just completed two years as provisionally registered teachers. We envisaged that third-year teachers would be able to recall and reflect on their induction experiences, and we were also interested in following their careers for a number of years.

We tracked Robert and 56 other promising new teachers from the beginning of their third year of teaching for four further years (Cameron, Baker, & Lovett, 2006). The teachers had graduated from six different teacher preparation institutions in five cities and were teaching in a wide range of primary, intermediate and secondary schools. To qualify for our study, teachers had to be recommended by the institutions where they gained their teaching qualifications, and their current principals had to agree that they were showing particular promise. When principals talked about these teachers they tended to use fire metaphors such as “an absolute cracker” with the ability to “light fires” and enthuse learners, characteristics that all principals and parents would love the teachers in their school to have.

Did school leaders appreciate that these “fire lighters” had chosen their schools in which to begin their careers and pull out all stops to support them? Linda Darling-Hammond, a US researcher, points out that “well prepared capable teachers have the largest impact on student learning and they need to be treasured and supported” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 7). Unfortunately, too many of the teachers in this study were neither treasured nor supported, and like the teachers in the Harvard study they tended not to stay in schools that did not support them in their professional learning. Twenty percent of the teachers in our study voluntarily left their first teaching positions to find a school that better supported their professional learning. We, and other researchers, have found that the common factors in teachers’ decisions to move to other schools or to leave teaching altogether are strongly related to their overall job satisfaction. And most of the conditions associated with job satisfaction, and the degree to which teachers want to stay in their particular schools, are largely in the control of schools themselves.

Only half the teachers in our research viewed their first workplaces as environments that provided them with the conditions and support necessary for them to make a successful start to their careers. Most of these teachers were in primary schools. Teachers in intermediate and secondary schools were much less likely to report supportive inductions to teaching. Almost half of the 22 secondary teachers reported minimal guidance and support. Although our study is about

a relatively small group of 57 teachers, these findings have been subsequently confirmed by larger scale New Zealand studies (Anthony & Kane, 2008; Cameron et al., 2007).

We have written this book so that readers can appreciate, from the perspectives of the teachers themselves, the attitudes and practices that contribute a solid start to teaching, and what happens to beginning teachers when their early career learning is left to chance. This book aims to help readers understand how early experiences affect teachers' motivation, job satisfaction and abilities as teachers. It highlights the kinds of learning environments for beginning teachers<sup>4</sup> that provide the best possible start to their careers, help them develop into good teachers and prevent them from becoming so burnt out or disillusioned that they leave before they become the good teachers we need them to be. If we want all children to have opportunities to become successful learners, then all teachers need ongoing opportunities to learn to develop their teaching in response to changing expectations, new knowledge and different contexts. Finally, this book aims to show readers ways to strengthen the quality and consistency of support and professional learning for teachers in their first few years of teaching.

Throughout the book there are real-life examples from the teachers in our study that highlight both helpful and less helpful school practices, as well as research-informed suggestions for strengthening the learning cultures in which teachers work.

## **Who this book is for**

This book is intended primarily for school leaders and those with responsibility for supporting beginning and early career teachers. This includes heads of departments in secondary schools, people with overall responsibility for supervising a group of new teachers (often deputy principals) or specialist classroom teachers. In primary schools the principal is likely to be directly involved in the supervision of beginning teachers, in addition to a designated tutor (or mentor) teacher. In both secondary and primary schools other teachers in the school are important sources of support and guidance to beginning teachers. The final chapter is directed at beginning teachers themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> We use the term "beginning teacher" to describe teachers in their first two years of teaching, and the term "early career teacher" to describe those with three to six years' teaching experience.

## How this book is organised

This book has five chapters following this introduction. Each chapter begins with real stories of teachers in our study that relate to the theme of the chapter. The themes are:

- supportive work contexts—setting the scene for success
- schools that support workplace learning
- mentoring
- widening horizons
- making induction work for you.

The first chapter contrasts the experiences of Rose and Vanessa,<sup>5</sup> who found themselves in very different work contexts when they began teaching. Rose had a principal and colleagues who took collective responsibility for ensuring that she was welcomed and valued as a contributing member of staff, and surrounded her with the support she needed. Vanessa's school left it to her to find her own way.

The second chapter tells the stories of Robert and Lucy, and the professional learning opportunities their schools provided for them. Robert was appointed to a school with a strong school culture of teacher learning, while Lucy's first school had many challenges and lacked the capacity to identify and support the learning needs of its beginning teachers.

The stories of Zoe and Steven in Chapter 3 highlight how mentoring can assist beginning teachers to plan and teach in purposeful ways, develop a professional identity that fits their skills and values and learn from their teaching practice. Zoe and Steven had very different mentoring experiences, which in Zoe's case gave her the confidence and skill to succeed with a challenging class. Steven had no formal mentoring, and it was up to him to access informal support from his colleagues.

Chapter 4 is illustrated by the stories of three teachers, Xanthe, Natalie and Ruby. Natalie and Xanthe had principals who helped them to widen their horizons by allowing them to teach at different levels across their schools, and then gave them opportunities to extend their skills by working to support the practice of other teachers. Ruby was beginning to lose interest in teaching when her principal appointed her to a new and satisfying leadership role.

The final chapter provides guidance for those about to become beginning teachers on how they can engage in and influence their own professional learning.

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5 The names of teachers are not their real names.