Your teaching skills improve as you gain more experience in the classroom, but NTIP helped me in terms of being better informed, and being better equipped for what I am doing. (New Teacher)

Project Leader
Ruth G. Kane, PhD

With:

Habib Siam
Meaghan Conner
Adrian Jones
Jennifer Rottmann
The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), including requirements for the performance appraisal process for new teachers, was developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education following consultation with education partners including the faculties of education, parent groups, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), teacher federations, principals, and trustees. A comprehensive literature review examining induction in other countries and a pilot project that involved 21 school boards contributed to the final shape of the NTIP which came into legislation through the passing of the Student Performance Bill in June 2006. The NTIP requires that all Ontario publicly funded school boards offer the NTIP to their new teachers, and all teachers new to Ontario’s publicly funded schools are required to participate in the NTIP. New teachers are defined as teachers certified by the OCT who have been hired for the first time in Ontario into permanent positions (full-time or part-time). The NTIP comprises three induction elements (orientation, mentoring and professional development) and includes the requirement for all school boards to appraise their new teachers two times within the first twelve months of employment. The University of Ottawa under the leadership of Dr Ruth Kane was invested with the responsibility of conducting an evaluation of the implementation of the NTIP across Ontario in its first two years of operation (2006/2007 & 2007/2008). This report presents the findings from that two-year evaluation project.

This research study examines the impact of the Ontario New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) and the experiences of new teachers, mentors and school principals during 2006-2008. The following research questions were developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education to frame this project.

1. Have there been any changes in retention rates at school board and provincial levels?
2. Have teaching assignments changed since school boards began implementing the NTIP?
3. Do new teachers report, and do principals and mentors report new teachers exhibiting enhanced competency in: classroom management and planning; assessment and evaluation; communicating with parents; and/or, teaching students with special needs and other diverse learners?
4. If so, is this a result of professional development, mentoring or a combination of both?
5. Do new teachers find the NTIP beneficial in helping to improve their teaching practice?
6. Do mentors feel that their teaching practice has improved as a result of the mentoring relationship?
7. What barriers have teachers faced in participating in the program?
8. What were their views regarding the usefulness of the program?
9. Do new teachers feel an increase in confidence and job satisfaction as a result of the NTIP?
10. Do mentors plan to continue in their mentoring roles in ensuing years?
11. Do mentors and administrators feel that the training they received to prepare them for their role in the NTIP was adequate?
METHODOLOGY

This project comprises a province-wide evaluation of the (NTIP) and its implementation in schools across Ontario over two annual cycles. The research design draws on data generated through both quantitative (web-based questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) means to ensure both province-wide coverage and an opportunity for the richness of personal experience of the NTIP to be examined. The evaluation of the NTIP is conducted through two distinct but related phases, each of which is being repeated in two annual cycles. Phase One comprised province-wide questionnaires for new teachers, mentors and principals who participated in the NTIP. All new teachers, mentors and principals are invited (via email through their School Board NTIP contact) to complete a questionnaire targeted to their group. Phase Two involved interviews of new teachers, mentors and principals in 13 selected school boards, in each of the two years, to determine their experiences of the NTIP.

ONTARIO NEW TEACHER POPULATION

Across the two years of this project (2008/2007 and 2007/2008) over 12941 new teachers were appointed to positions in Ontario schools. Of these new teachers, approximately 8% were appointed in French language school boards each year. In the Cycle One of the project 57% of schools reported hiring at least one new teacher. This increased in Cycle Two with 63.3% of schools hiring at least one new teacher. Fewer than 300 of Ontario schools report hiring more than five new teachers in either year (Cycle One, 234; Cycle Two, 283). The number of new hires varies significantly from one region to the next, with the Toronto region consistently accounting for over 40% of the new teacher appointments in both Cycle One and Cycle Two and the Thunder Bay region accounting for less than 2% each year.

Questionnaire Participation

Across the two annual cycles, questionnaires were completed by 1974 new teachers; 1791 from English Language School Boards (90.7%) and 183 from French Language School Boards (9.3%). The participation of new teachers from the French language school boards increased from 3% of respondents in Cycle One to 8% in Cycle Two. Respondents across both cycles were from Public (64%) and Catholic (36%) school boards and they represent 14.5% of the new teacher population. While in Cycle One, 60% of the new teacher respondents had graduated from their teacher education programs within the previous two years. In Cycle Two, this percentage rose to 72%.

Across the two years 1389 mentors completed questionnaires, 1262 (91%) of whom taught in English Language School Boards and the remaining 127 mentors (9%) taught in French Language School Boards. The participation of mentors from French language school boards increased from 4% on Cycle One to 13.3% in Cycle Two, a relative increase of over 300%. Mentors were both from public (61.5%) and Catholic (38.5%) school boards.

Questionnaires were completed by 1022 principals or vice-principals across the two year evaluation. A total of 921 of the participants (90%) were principals from English language school boards, with the remaining 101 (10%) working in French language
school boards. Participation by principals increased from 410 in Cycle One to 612 in Cycle Two and the relative participation of principals/vice principals from French language school boards doubled across the two cycles (from 6.3% to 12.3%) Principal/Vice-principal respondents were from both public (61%) and Catholic (39%) school boards.

**PHASE TWO SAMPLE**

Across the two years of the evaluation, teachers and principals and vice-principals from 25 school boards participated in interviews to determine their experiences of the NTIP. School sites were selected each year from 13 school boards (Toronto District School Board participated in both years) with attention to ensuring representation from Catholic and public, French and English, rural and urban, and large and small school boards. Across the two cycles, research team members visited 92 school sites comprising 39 elementary and 48 secondary and 5 schools which identified as ‘other’. Of the sites visited, 48 were Public schools and 44 were Catholic schools. Seventeen schools were located in six French language school boards.

During Cycle One and Cycle Two, the research team interviewed: 182 new teachers (146 English-language teachers; 36 French language teachers); 139 mentors (99 English-language teachers; 26 French language teachers); and, 70 principals/vice-principals (58 English-language school boards; 12 French language school boards)

**FINDINGS**

The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) rests on the assumption that a systematic process of induction, mentoring and professional development will enhance the beginning teachers’ development towards the level of experienced classroom teacher. It has been introduced with the underlying goal of supporting new teachers to reach their full potential through complementing and extending the work of preservice teacher education. There is no doubt that teachers and principals feel the NTIP is a necessary and worthwhile initiative and that its implementation has made significant progress towards supporting new teachers’ professional development. This evaluation sought to examine participants’ ‘experiences’ of the NTIP and the ‘impact’ these experiences had on new teacher competence across target areas and on their confidence and satisfaction as teachers. Where possible, we also sought to identify which of the NTIP elements most impacted on new teacher development.

In general, participants suggest that orientation to the board and the school is something that evolves in the early days of a teacher’s appointment and so is facilitated much more effectively with new teachers appointed well before the beginning of the school year. While new teachers appreciate that not all appointment decisions are made before September, they would like to commence their positions with an introduction to key staff within the school, a clear understanding of the expectations that the principal has of them in terms of teaching and in terms of supporting established school policy and procedures.

While some differences were identified with respect to mentoring across the two years of the evaluation, mentoring is consistently identified by new teachers the most
important element of the NTIP. Having a mentor who is teaching the same subject (secondary) or grade level (elementary) is considered the priority. This is evident through positive and negative accounts. The mentoring relationship typically comprises informal pragmatic encounters as opposed to scheduled meetings. While mentors are strongly committed to supporting the new teachers they are somewhat tentative in their roles and they look to the future to explore the potential of more structured mentoring. Mentors call for increased professional development to ensure their work better supports the new teachers’ pedagogical and instructional skills.

What has become apparent over the second year of this evaluation especially is that different elements of the NTIP are more effective in impacting in specific areas of new teacher development. Addressing key priority areas identified by the Ministry (classroom management, assessment, differentiated learning, and communication with parents) is most effective when new teachers have a positive mentor relationship and attend professional development sessions. New teachers who have mentors within the same subject area and school and who participate in targeted professional development in the key areas of classroom management and assessment and evaluation reflect the most positive impacts in these key areas. Being immersed in inclusive classroom contexts and participating in targeted professional development has enabled the new teachers to develop deeper understanding and pedagogical practices related to teaching students with diverse learning needs. In terms of communication with parents, new teachers have further developed their skills in this area through experience and guidance from their mentors, colleagues, and particularly the administration within their schools.

New teachers are generally confident and satisfied with their induction into teaching and believe that the NTIP has supported their transition and enabled them to be better teachers. Mentors and principals agree that new teachers are more confident and have settled more effectively into their professional roles than previous cohorts. New teachers, mentors and principals all concur that the enhanced confidence of new teachers directly impacts on their relationships with their students and their teaching performance in the classrooms and will lead to enhanced student achievement. The findings are consistent in that all participants argue that new teachers’ participation in the NTIP has, or has the potential to, indirectly effect student achievement.

The scope of this study is such that participants can report only their own experiences and perceptions as evidence of enhanced teaching and learning. In some cases, principals can (and do) report that new teacher performance appraisals generate less areas of concern than those of previous new teachers and this contributes to their perception that the NTIP is having a positive impact on new teacher performance and potentially student achievement. Principals also refer to a lessening in general of new teacher critical incidents, absences and calls for assistance of the administration. Mentors who have engaged in observations of new teacher practice or who work in team teaching situations with new teachers can document the new teachers’ professional growth as evidence. In each of these cases the authenticity of the claim relies on our trust of the principal’s and/or the mentor’s professional judgment and experience in similar situations.

---

1 When speaking generally about the beginning teacher and mentor relationship it is assumed that beginning teachers could have more than one mentor.
with other new teachers over recent years. While claims of enhanced student achievement are not supported with empirically derived quantitative data on student achievement, the professional judgment of principals and experienced teacher mentors does lend weight to such claims.

School boards are reflecting different models of the NTIP across the province and some appear to be better established and more positively received than others. If province-wide confidence in the induction of beginning teachers is one of the goals of the program, then it may be appropriate at this time to develop a way of sharing best practices. It is also important to illuminate the barriers to the effective participation in the NTIP which were identified through this project.

Time to address professional learning is the most prominent barrier identified. Although each school board allocates time release for new teachers, they are often reluctant to leave their classrooms to participate in the NTIP activities as they perceive the planning for replacement coupled with the tenuous relationship they have established with their students, is not worth the absence. In addition both new teachers and mentors call for more scheduled time together so that they might plan the new teacher’s professional development program, observe each other teach or engage in shared dialogue and planning.

A strong finding of this evaluation that the NTIP should be extended to include beginning long-term occasional (LTO) teachers in the induction elements of the program, and the program be offered over the first two years of a new teacher’s career. Supported by new teachers, second year teachers, mentors and principals is the notion that new teachers are too overwhelmed in year one to gain the full benefit of the NTIP activities and they would be much better served if their complement of release days to attend professional development, the support of their mentor and their opportunity to observe lead teachers in action was extended through to the second year of their teaching. This would enable new teachers to consolidate and apply learning from professional development with the continued support of an experienced mentor.

There is a general reluctance of new teachers and mentors to engage in observations of classroom practice and professional conversations based on these observations. Even in school boards where lead teachers across subjects and grade levels have been identified as model classrooms open for observations, new teachers have been slow to take up this opportunity. Mentors are also reluctant to promote observations and generally leave it to the new teacher to take the initiative. In so doing the new teachers are forgoing the opportunity for rich situated learning that has been demonstrated to be a critical part of new teacher induction.

The Cycle Two findings in particular highlight the number of new teachers who were given what could be considered challenging teaching assignments for which they perceived they had limited preparation. New teachers who were teaching split grade classes or who are specialist music, technology, English as a Second Language (ESL) or French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers, found that the professional development sessions offered were not coherent with their needs. This is also the case with those new

---

2 Split Grades is a term used when two or more grades are combined within one classroom, also referred to as combined grades.
teachers who may have been experienced teachers from other jurisdictions. In these disparate cases, new teachers found that a ‘lack of fit’ with the professional development offerings presented a real barrier to their participation in the professional development. These experiences draw attention to the need for principals to exercise their flexibility in designing NTIP activities that suit each of their new teachers.

School boards which have schools in geographically isolated locations face additional dilemmas and constraints to the effective roll-out of the NTIP program in their schools. Teachers in these more northern regions can struggle to identify appropriate mentors, have further to travel to attend professional development, and have difficulty in accessing supply teachers. Teachers in isolated regions also have specific professional development needs related to the profiles of their students who can be largely of Aboriginal heritage and thus have specific culturally-bound learning needs. These are real and very clear challenges that the participants in more isolated schools face compared to others that need to be addressed to enable them to fully participate in and benefit from the NTIP.

In addressing the questions above we call for continued research into the impact of the NTIP and in particular to identifying the elements of the NTIP which are most effective in supporting new teachers. Becoming a teacher is a complex and ongoing process of professional learning and development and situated learning within the school context is impacted by a multitude of variables. There is clear evidence from this study that the NTIP is having a positive impact on new teachers’ transition and integration into their new school communities. There is also strong evidence that new teachers, principals and mentors perceive the NTIP to be having a positive impact on the new teachers’ performance as teachers and that this in turn has the potential to positively impact on student achievement. To ensure the continued attention to those areas which may serve as barriers to achieving the goals of the NTIP we present below suggestions from the participants for the success and implementation of the NTIP.

They reflect both suggestions made directly by participants and considerations derived from analysis of the data, and are offered as a formative outcome of the first two cycles of the NTIP Evaluation.

**Considerations to the Ministry of Education**

- Continue to fund the NTIP as a necessary initiative for all new teachers.
- Explore the possibility of differentiated funding to meet the specific additional costs experienced by teachers in more isolated northern school boards.
- Extend all the induction elements of the NTIP, including mentoring, to include beginning LTO teachers.
- Extend the NTIP to a two year program through stretching the funding over the first two years of teaching which would allow new teachers/beginning LTO teachers the opportunity to fully access the necessary induction elements of the NTIP, and the time to critically reflect on their own professional learning and to embed new understandings into their practice.
• Continue to encourage school boards and principals to differentiate the NTIP for individual teachers to take into account those who have experience in other jurisdictions.
• Review resources available through NTIP with the view to ensuring their accessibility to mentors and new teachers in user friendly formats.

**Considerations to the School Boards**

• Offer school board orientations in late August/early September and again as required later in the year to welcome new teachers to the board expectations and inform them of board protocols and policies.
• Use the orientation to offer professional development targeted to first day, first week and first month.
• Ensure all participants are familiar with expectations of their roles in implementing the NTIP with particular attention to the specific expectations of principals, mentors and new teachers.
• Offer mentor training that introduces mentors to a range of mentoring models and clarifies the opportunities of their roles. In particular include training on providing constructive feedback to new teachers.
• Introduce opportunities throughout the year for mentors to attend mentor training updates and to share mentoring strategies.
• Offer early release days for mentors and their new teachers to attend an introductory session together where they are both given an overview of the goals and expectations of the NTIP so they both get the same message. The groups could then be separated for specific activities but the goals would be that both mentor and new teacher hear the same description of goals, possibilities, focus, etc. in an initial common session.
• Identify a cohort of lead teachers across divisions and subjects who would host observations by new teachers in their classrooms and be available for a debriefing meeting following observations. (These lead teachers would need training to debrief with new teachers.)
• Encourage new teachers and mentors to undertake observations of teaching as a means to initiate and frame professional conversations.
• Develop effective communication systems within the board so that new teachers, mentors and principals receive information about the NTIP activities in a timely manner.
• Consider the establishment of an electronic forum for new teachers.
• Communicate an annual schedule of professional development to all new teachers, their mentors and principals early in the school year and encourage new teachers to discuss potential professional development sessions with their mentors and plan ahead.
• Give attention to differentiating professional development to ensure that where possible they are division-specific and relevant to specific subject needs.
• Offer targeted professional development for new teachers with particular teaching assignments such as those teaching split grade classes and teachers of Aboriginal students.
• Continue to encourage principals to differentiate the NTIP for individual new teachers in ways that take account of their current teaching assignment and their previous experience in other jurisdictions.

Considerations to the Schools

• School administration needs to explicitly embrace the NTIP to ensure that the NTIP is embedded as a critical component of school culture. This will encourage participation of mentors and new teachers in all aspects of the program.
• Closer attention needs to be paid to the teaching assignments of new teachers to ensure that they are not given the most challenging assignments.
• Matching of new teachers with mentors needs to be completed early in the school year and should involve the input of both the new teacher and the mentor.
• More attention needs to be given to matching mentees with mentors who have same grade, subject, or division teaching assignments. When this is not a possibility, new teachers should be paired with mentors who have substantial experience in the new teacher’s current teaching assignment in order to fully understand and support the new teacher within his/her particular context.
• Physical proximity of mentors and mentees will support development of a successful mentoring relationship. However, the partnering of new teachers with a mentor with the same teaching assignment (subject specialization) should take precedence even if the mentor is in another school.
• Where possible avoid mentors with significant on call responsibilities (such as resource teachers) and retired educators who are not readily accessible.
• In cases where the mentor is in a different school, care should be taken to ensure the new teacher has a buddy within the school to facilitate his/her transition into school community.
• Encourage new teachers in consultation with mentors to identify specific professional development activities that are best suited to the new teacher’s professional needs. In keeping with this commitment, allow new teachers and mentors to determine the focus of release days as either professional development, observation and/or shared planning, as appropriate to the new teacher’s specific needs.
• Promote observation and feedback as part of the mentoring relationship – both the new teacher observing the mentor and the mentor observing the new teacher.
• Identify potential mentors regardless of the number of new teachers and support them to go to training sessions and develop their leadership potential. Through them, a culture of mentoring within the school would be developed.