

Counselor- And Teacher-Led Support Groups For Beginning Teachers: A Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

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There is a shortage of research on elements of effective induction programs which provide support for the novice educator. Additionally, most programs lack a theoretical underpinning and rigorous evaluation. This descriptive study examined patterns in beginning teacher concerns, in reflective journal entries obtained in a natural treatment setting. The participants were 189 first-year teachers. The beginning teachers were experiencing the "reality shock" of beginning teaching. Previous studies had identified a number of crucial needs of novice educators: help in developing as a competent professional, mentor educators who are on-site and skilled as supervisors, time for mentors and themselves to work together, opportunities for new educators to talk with one another in a setting free from evaluation, orientation to the school and community, and a realistic first year assignment.

The treatment/support program provided psychological support and technical assistance to first-year teachers by drawing on the unique skills of counselors and teachers. The objectives for this program were as follows: selecting exemplary mentor counselors and mentor teachers to serve as support group facilitators, requiring first year teachers to participate in eight support meetings, informing mentor teachers of the nature and progress of support group sessions, and requiring session by session written dialogic reflection between facilitators and beginning teachers. Consistent guidelines were followed during the bimonthly two-hour meetings.

Analysis of the judged and coded data from beginning teacher written journals revealed patterns of concerns on three dimensions: self, classroom management, and student orientation. The patterns showed that the beginning teacher concerns evolved during the support sessions. Typically, the movement was self-concerns to classroom management concerns. Additionally, facilitator written feedback to beginning teacher journals encouraged more beginning teacher consideration of management and student issues. Facilitators also acknowledged and clarified "reality shock" issues in beginning teacher journals.

The study offers a method for analyzing the rich interactive process of support groups for beginning teachers. The findings suggest support groups should include dialogic written reflection, and that such a process, as practiced, is a complex, highly-interactive support structure for a beginning teacher's achievement of successful performance during the challenging first year.

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- Results of this study were published in *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 1995, 30(2), 105-117.
- A copy of this study is available from the MCTP for \$3.00 to cover shipping and handling.

