

# Guiding early educators with andragogy: A mixed-methods case study of new teacher induction, support, and development

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This mixed methods study examined the efficacy of a multi-year new teacher induction program for pre-tenure teachers; exploring the program's impact on teacher retention, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and overall quality. Findings revealed that while the program improved various aspects of teacher development, augmented pedagogical challenges and high attrition rates. The study highlights the significance of school climate in professional growth, the need for continuous support for new teachers and for further research to evaluate program impacts that develop effective teacher evaluation systems.

## INTRODUCTION

The teacher shortage crisis has impacted schools nationwide (Sutcher et al., 2016; 2019). This shortage of teachers has far-reaching consequences for schools, affecting both student achievement and school culture. As articulated by Partelow (2020), the future of our schools and the success of our students depend on our ability to recruit, support, and retain effective teachers. New teacher induction programs play a pivotal role in supporting educators during their early years in the profession. As described by Wong (2005), these programs provide comprehensive professional development that helps new teachers navigate the complexities of teaching, fosters community and supports retention. This study examines existing research on induction programs to identify the needs of new teachers and determine the support needed to retain quality educators to refine and enhance an induction program, "Grow to Great," implemented in a highly resourced suburban school district. Research questions include identifying professional support necessary for the success of new

teachers, assessing the impact of sustained professional development on their experience, retention, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and overall quality. Evaluation of the program's effectiveness involved qualitative analysis of teacher interviews and surveys, along with quantitative review of teacher evaluation scores and retention data. The data collected informed program implementation and necessary revisions, aiming to enhance teacher effectiveness, satisfaction, and retention.

## METHODS

The research entailed a mixed-methods case study to explore the experiences of teachers enrolled in a new teacher induction program and its impact on their evaluation scores and teacher retention rates. The consolidation enables a thorough examination of the program's impact on teacher outcomes, driven by the practicality and complexity of implementation, necessitating evidence of efficacy through a constructivist approach to data analysis; without both quantitative and qualitative data, districts may lack a complete understanding, hindering informed decision-making. The methodology employed case study design, aligning with the complexity of the research problem and allowing for triangulation of multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). The integration and triangulation of data informs school districts' decisions regarding the adoption of similar induction programs, offering a holistic view of their potential benefits. Participants were selected to represent various perspectives, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the program's effects. The study included all teachers enrolled in the four-year "Grow to Great" program, comprising both early

career teachers and more experienced educators in their pre-tenure stage within the school district, amounting to 75 participants in 2021-2022 and growing to 100 in 2022-2023. Participants in the study emphasized three main pillars of support crucial for new teachers: a strong professional learning community, development of instructional knowledge and clarity in expectations. Participants emphasized the program's role in facilitating their transition into the school district; despite positive evaluations, tension arose between the perceived effectiveness of the induction program and high attrition rates, revealing a broader issue of lack of clarity from administration.

**Pillar 1: Professional Learning Community:** Participants emphasized the pivotal role of a supportive professional learning community, encompassing colleagues, mentors, administrators, and coaches within the induction program, shaping their pre-tenure experiences and fostering both personal and professional growth. Mentor teachers provided tailored support, aiding in community integration and instructional assistance, while connections forged with colleagues facilitated collaborative efforts across subjects and grades, bolstering support and instructional collaboration. Administrative backing was highlighted as crucial in navigating school dynamics, with access to professional developers serving as a valuable resource for collaboration, advice, and coaching, aiding in instructional practices and addressing emotional needs.

**Pillar 2: Development of Instructional Knowledge:** Participants reflected on the transformative impact of the "Grow to Great" program on their professional development, noting enhanced teaching practices and access to crucial resources. Interviews and surveys revealed how the program prompted reevaluation of teaching methods, fostering deeper pedagogical insights and expanding instructional toolkits. Participants credited the program with bolstering self-efficacy and providing opportunities for collaboration, citing resources, research, and modeling as key contributors to positive classroom cultures. Overall, they acknowledged the program's pivotal role in supporting their growth as educators, fostering leadership skills, and instilling confidence in instructional practice, affirming its value in professional development.

**Pillar 3: Clarity & Consistency:** Participants stressed the importance of clarity and consistency in supporting pre-tenure teachers, highlighting the necessity of clear expectations, instructional norms, and alignment with the district's educational vision for a smooth transition into their roles. They emphasized the value of well-defined evaluation processes and continuity in teaching assignments in fostering growth, satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Understanding district expectations and evaluation criteria facilitated alignment of teaching practices, while familiarity with school norms aided effective role navigation. Continuity in teaching assignments was cited as vital for increasing comfort with curriculum and instructional practices, enhancing confidence and effectiveness. Overall, participants called for increased support to meet district expectations and thrive as educators, viewing programs like "Grow to Great" as valuable investments in professional development that contribute to a positive work environment and job satisfaction.

**Improving New Teacher Effectiveness:** The exploration of the new teacher induction program's role in enhancing professional growth and evaluation outcomes emphasized its impact on teachers' instructional ability, particularly in improving their evaluation scores assessed using the Danielson Evaluation Rubric (Danielson, 2007). An analysis was conducted to assess whether the "Grow to Great" program contributed to teacher improvement, as reflected in their evaluation scores received through observations. Regression results were examined to understand the relationship between the New Teacher Induction (NTI) program and various factors influencing teacher performance, such as experience, probationary status, gender, school levels, formal evaluation, administration levels, schooling years, and teaching subjects. Panel data methods, particularly random

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effectss (RE) models, were used due to the data's variation across teachers and over time. The estimation results revealed a positive impact of the NTI program on teacher performance, with participants showing higher performance compared to non-participants. Specifically, participation in the NTI program was associated with a 0.101 increase in teacher composite scores on average. Additionally, factors such as years of experience and tenure status also influenced teacher performance. However, other factors like gender, school level, formal evaluation, teaching subjects, and certain administration levels were not statistically significant at the 5% level.

**Summary of Findings:** The research highlights three main areas of support deemed most beneficial for new teachers: a strong professional learning community, the development of instructional knowledge and the importance of clarity and consistency in expectations, responsibilities, and norms. Participants noted that the program provided access to resources and staff, and skill development opportunities, aiding their transition and fostering growth. However, the relationship between the program and teacher retention was inconclusive, despite its positive impact on participants' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Notably, participation in the program was linked to statistically significant differences in teacher evaluation scores.

## CONCLUSIONS

The "Grow to Great" program, rooted in Malcolm Knowles' (2020) framework and informed by Wong (2004) and Hiebert et al. (2002), significantly impacted new teachers' experiences by providing a multi-year induction program focused on instruction, combined with mentoring and support. It fostered collegial relationships and access to professional resources, aiding new teachers in navigating district norms and instructional practices. The "Grow to Great" program demonstrated a significant impact on pre-tenure teachers enrolled in the initiative. Participants gained a deep understanding of instructional strategies, learned to make intentional choices in lesson structures and classroom environments, developed a supportive network of colleagues, mentors, and administrators, and motivated teachers to engage in professional development enhancing their efficacy and quality of life. However, despite efforts to clarify expectations and develop instructional skills, many new teachers struggled to thrive within the district, leading to high turnover rates.

Unforeseen external factors, such as a lack of clarity in instructional expectations, posed challenges to the program's success. The program struggled to align and engage stakeholders effectively, leading to miscommunication and resistance to change. This mismatch hindered teachers' ability to navigate evolving instructional expectations and impacted retention rates. Despite the program's intent to accelerate growth and provide access to supportive networks, the lack of clarity and alignment with broader district practices undermined its effectiveness.

The study examined the impact of the "Grow to Great" new teacher program within the broader context of a school district, uncovering complex dynamics influencing new teachers' experience. While the induction program addressed several needs, external factors such as district and school climate, characterized by organizational structures, interpersonal dynamics, high turnover rates, and ambiguous success metrics, contributed to feelings of instability and dissatisfaction among pre-tenure teachers. Interviews revealed pervasive stress and uncertainty despite the program's support efforts, exacerbating community strain due to teacher turnover. Participants emphasized tenure as a symbol of job security and professional validation, yet perceived tenure decisions as arbitrary, fostering disempowerment and dependence; this uncertainty hindered professional growth. In summary, while the "Grow to Great" program aimed to support new teachers' development and enhance their effectiveness, it grappled with broader systemic challenges within the district. Addressing issues of instability, job security, and clarity around tenure criteria is essential to create a supportive environment conducive to teachers' professional growth and retention.

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## RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should focus on understanding the influence of school culture on pre-tenure teachers, recognizing it as a crucial factor in their professional development and well-being. Factors such as leadership, support, collaboration, and a safe, inclusive environment significantly impact teachers' career trajectories. Investigating these aspects can provide insights to shape policies and practices that foster favorable conditions for teacher growth and retention. While sustained professional development is vital, the school or district's climate plays an equally important role. Simply investing in professional development is not enough; prioritizing the creation of nurturing school environments is imperative. This approach ensures that educators have the necessary conditions to excel, contributing to the longevity and effectiveness of the teaching profession.

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