



**Research Report of the Month**  
**NOVEMBER 2004**

Nugent, P., & Faucette, N. (2004).

**Developing beginning teachers through an interactive induction and internship program.**

Action in Teacher Education, 26, 53-63.

**INTRODUCTION**

It would have been fun to be a fly on the wall when it all began. Two professorial-type teacher educators were sitting around trying to figure out how to meet the demands imposed by new program accreditation guidelines. With a fixed budget, a restricted number of credits in the program, and an already overburdened faculty, the gloomy silence was palpable.

Then one of professors brightened and asked, "What if we did this.....?" Her colleague probably replied with something like, "Oh sure! Not in a thousand years. Come on, get real." Perhaps there then was a long silence while they looked at each other. Hanging in the air between the two professors was the unspoken question, "But, why not?"

This report documents a program evaluation study of what happened when Nugent and Faucette decided to actually find out the answer to "What if we did this....?" They set up a small field trial for an idea that, at first blush, would sound outrageous to anyone. They gave first-year physical education teachers the responsibility of serving as cooperating teachers. In that way both novice teachers and student interns could interact with the program's field supervisors (and each other) in the same place, at the same time.

To call an event like that a moment of pedagogical inspiration surely is to over-dramatize (administrative desperation might be a better characterization). To pass it off as nothing more than problem-solving, however, is to undervalue what it takes to look at the world of familiar arrangements – and imagine them to be different. Although the investigators here might deny it, that kind of solution only emerges where there is creative genius – and more than a little courage.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Everyone in physical education knows that for most new graduates, the first year of induction into the culture of full-time teaching in a public school is a rite of passage closely related to hell itself. Marginalized as low-status special subject specialists, overwhelmed by the enormity of responsibilities for children, overloaded with extra-class duties, unsupported in their efforts to put into practice what they learned in their preparation programs, stunned by the absolute lack of time for preparation or reflection, and dulled by simple exhaustion, the shock of reality leads to "wash out" of commitment and thence to defection from teaching.

Historically, we have looked to the schools for the support of programs designed to confront the complex problem of teacher induction. In physical education, however, that arrangement has not always provided an effective solution. It came as no surprise, then, that new program standards from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education began to push the idea that

university and college programs must also bear some responsibility for mentoring first-year teachers. Such mandates, however, always come without resources for their accomplishment.

Preparing physical educators in programs that must meet increasingly prescriptive but unfunded mandates from state legislatures and accrediting agencies would be challenging under any circumstances. In a political environment that gives absolute priority to the academic preparation of teachers (and to the preparation of academic teachers), the conditions for preparing physical educators have become even more difficult. Surely those dilemmas must have been much on the minds of Nugent and Faucette when they devised the program under examination here.

The theoretical underpinning of their idea to assign student interns (SIs) to new teachers (NTs) rests in the models for "learning communities" that have appeared in the educational literature. In short, these are (usually) small aggregations of people who may have different roles within an organization but who agree to collaborate because each has something at stake (and to contribute) that makes positive interdependence attractive. Often accompanied by explicit efforts to design a mutually caring environment, the central themes in a learning community are to solve problems together, learn about new work strategies together, and grow in individual capacity through collaborative action.

### **THE PROGRAM**

The concept of a learning community may sound a little fanciful, but in this program it boiled down to the proposition that if two university supervisors, four first year teachers, and eight preservice interns could work together as a small learning community, each could get what they needed. Here are the three goals that are implicit in the prospectus for the Interactive Induction and Internship Program (IIIP).

- (1) For the SIs, participation in IIIP could provide: (a) realistic experience with children in a field setting, (b) close, on-site supervision, (c) feedback that was positive and immediate, and (c) the more general support provided by sharing among colleagues.
- (2) For the NTs, participation in IIIP could provide: (a) the status afforded by being given special professional responsibilities, (b) regularized community relationships that reduced isolation, and (c) periodic relief from the immediate demands of instruction with the concomitant provision of time for other aspects of teaching (planning, creating materials, evaluation, communicating with parents, etc.).
- (3) Finally, for the university field supervisors (USs) the creation of IIIP would mean: (a) accomplishing a new task (induction support) without additional resources, (b) creating a clinical setting where neither SIs nor NTs were forced to abandon the values and commitments of their training program for lack of collegial support (or resistance from within the worksite), and (c) acting out their own values regarding the social creation of knowledge and skill through collaborative action.

As you could imagine, there were ample reasons to be skeptical about IIIP, not least because it broke with the traditional belief that only experienced teachers can serve as effective supervisors of preservice interns. This was an instance in which building in an evaluation study, one with a protocol for collecting data from the outset, was more a necessity than a luxury.

### **THE STUDY**

Four NTs in a large urban district served as cooperating teachers for eight SIs (two interns for each teacher, two days each week, for 13 weeks). Two of the NTs were in one elementary school, while each of the other two held positions at separate elementary sites. The two USs (who also were the primary investigators) were from two different universities. Both were experienced in the work of field supervision and during the study were able to perform all school visits as a team.

All teaching appointments were within the same school district, and all sites were within commuting distance from the universities.

Before moving on to description of method and analysis, it will be important for readers to be aware of the unique circumstances that attended the trial implementation of IIP. First, special permission had to be obtained for the use of first-year teachers in the role of cooperating teachers. Local policy dictated a minimum of three years of experience. The argument that IIP was an experimental program with a strong research component was successful in obtaining a waiver of the district regulation, but in other districts or under other circumstances it might not have been so.

Second, one training program provided all of the participating SIs and NTs. In consequence, everyone in the learning community started out by reading from the same page of understandings about physical education. Again, that was an unusual if not unique circumstance.

Third, in planning IIP a decision was made to limit the role of the USs relative to the NTs. They provided NTs with such nurture as was natural to the situation (attentive listening, professional conversation, and personal encouragement) but did not provide evaluation of their teaching. There was close collaboration around curriculum, workplace matters, and issues related to the development of the SIs, but this was not a program designed to mentor the pedagogical development of the NTs. That means the USs attended primarily to the teaching performances and developmental needs of the SIs. When on site, the USs respected the roles of the NTs as cooperating teachers, and were careful to show appreciation for that work in front of students and other school personnel.

Fourth, and finally, there can be no doubt that IIP was powerfully shaped by the fact that the participants were purposively selected by the investigators (who, you will remember, also served as USs). Based on personal experience and an accumulation of evaluation documents, the participants were selected from larger pools of potential candidates specifically because they represented good candidates for participation in IIP. As the report explains,

When reviewing their records we noted their commitments to excellence; evidence of openness to new ideas or feedback; collegiality with us, other teachers and peers; positive attitudes toward inclusive physical education; and sensitivity to critical issues involving education such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and ability. (p.55)

It is clear that the investigators intended to give IIP every possible chance to show what it could do. Under the circumstances of a preliminary trial for an innovative program; that seems entirely reasonable. It is important to remember, however, that a less carefully selected cadre of participants might have produced very different results.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Using interview guides with follow-up probes, each NT was interviewed before and after their participation in IIP. In a similar fashion, all SIs were interviewed at the close of their field experience. All interviews were both audio- and video-taped for later transcription and analysis. In addition, careful field notes were jointly maintained by the USs after each site visit (on alternate weeks) when observations and informal dialogue with participants generated insights into issues, concerns, interests, conflicts, progress, and plans.

This latter material was subject to ongoing analysis that could be used to shape subsequent observations and conversations. More formal observation logs were created for the SIs and used as the basis for supervisory feedback and group problem solving sessions. Finally, the SIs submitted weekly self-reports including lesson plans, critical incidents, insights, accounts of feedback from NTs, and goals for improvement.

## DATA ANALYSIS

During the project, transcripts and other documents were continuously coded for content units, and categories and subcategories were created for sorting coded material. As these intermediate products accumulated, subsequent observations were used to confirm the adequacy of the evolving category system and the accuracy of the portrayals that began to emerge. In many instances, these were shared with participants as a means of obtaining member checks on accuracy, as well as a way to further enrich the data base. Comparisons were made across participants to further clarify and refine the coding and categorization of data, as well as to validate the researchers' consequent understanding of what was happening in the IIIP learning communities.

## RESULTS

Here we come to a fundamental limitation on the process of annotating a qualitative study. As in the present case, there can be pages of descriptive material from logs, field notes, and quotations from participants that are used to illustrate and document the points asserted as results from the study. For the sake of economy, little of that can be repeated here, and that is a deletion which strips the report of both the power of persuasive evidence and the personal impact of a vivid story. All I can do is assert that the following points seemed to be well-documented, and that the investigators appear to be persuaded that their interpretation of events can be trusted.

- 1). Once on the job, the responsibilities of serving as cooperating teachers hit the NTs hard, particularly as they discovered just how exhausting teaching was going to be. At the outset, they also suffered from a degree of performance anxiety about working with their interns, "I don't know if I'll do things right."
- 2). The moment the NTs figured out that the presence of SIs was going to help them as much (or more) than it was going to cost them (and time was always the unit of analysis in this calculus), they cheered up considerably. They quickly began to explore what sort of help the interns needed and how it might be provided. In turn, that led to a growing sense of pride in having been selected to bear such serious responsibility in an innovative project. Interview data clearly showed that NTs grew progressively more confident both as teachers and as supervisors.
- 3). At the center of the learning community experience was the ubiquitous fact of communication. "We can talk to each other," was repeated over and over as the participants' analysis of what was important in IIIP.
- 4). Being part of IIIP gave an unexpected degree of status and recognition for NTs, at the university, and in the eyes of principals and classroom colleagues.
- 5). The whole idea of modeling effective teaching for the SIs appeared to have been very powerful and even empowering for the NTs. Listen for the sense of ownership in the following quote from a closing interview.

I enjoyed it because I felt like I was passing something on to them. I felt like I was a professor myself, and I like that a lot. With elementary students you can see the students learn, but to actually see your peers doing it and helping them out is even better. (p. 59)

6). Upon the program's completion, the NTs expressed a sense of loss. They were particularly frank about mourning the inevitable reduction of scarce planning time (when SIs could take over classes). There also was talk, however, about missing the brainstorming and professional discourse with SIs and about the lost pleasures (and efficiencies) of shared rather than solitary responsibilities. Quotations from terminal interviews suggest that the NTs already realized how much they were saddened by the loss of camaraderie and by the absence of another adult with whom to talk. The data from this study reminded me once again of how terribly lonely it can be when you are surrounded by children.

7). There was evidence that neither NTs nor SIs abandoned the pedagogical commitments that had been forged in their training programs. While that may not continue beyond the life of the community created in IIIP, the investigators counted it as a positive beginning.

8). Although the study design did not involve collection of data concerning the development of teaching skills among the SIs, there is ample indication that they participated in the learning community and regarded it as a positive feature of their internship. What the investigators did confirm was that at the school site there actually had been more contact time between the SIs and USs than would have been the case under more typical conditions. Quite simply, that was because, given the activities of IIIP, the supervisors tended to stay longer during each visit at the site.

## **A CONCLUSION**

Finally, the investigators testified to a personal observation which they characterized as "the most exhilarating outcome of IIIP." They had detected a strong sense of agency in the words and behaviors of the participants. Both NTs and SIs appeared to have been inculcated with a sense that by working together they could make good things happen in a class, in a program, and even in a school. To which I can only add, "Who knows where such heresy might lead?"

Given the encouraging findings from the study and the generally positive reaction of both school and university administrations, the investigators presently are tooling up to repeat IIIP with another cycle of preservice SIs and elementary school NTs. What a wonderful opportunity for a replication study with deliberate variation in one or several of the variables. What change do you think might yield further insights into the operation of this unusual arrangement for teacher development?

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