TEACHERS’ PERCEIVED NEEDS WITHIN A RESPONSIVE INDUCTION PROGRAM STRUCTURED AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experiences of induction teachers as they participated in an induction program structured as a learning community. The induction class met seven times during the year and was designed to incorporate structured opportunities for reflection. Teachers were given the opportunity to help shape the class by sharing preferences for class format and discussion and providing feedback through responses to the facilitator’s reflections.

The participants perceived the reflective writing was beneficial to their learning. Writing reflections ensured that they took time to reflect, and helped them gain new perspective. They also provided a safe space for teachers to vent their concerns, and initiate a dialogue with others about challenges they faced.

Induction teachers wanted to talk with other teachers about their practice and perceived that their participation in small discussion groups helped them to learn and grow as professionals. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to share ideas with their peers and receive feedback. They also believed that the groups helped them to get to know other teachers and build trusting relationships. While teachers perceived that reflective writing was helpful in fostering reflection, they believed their reflection was enhanced when they could discuss their challenges with colleagues. Beginning teachers
also indicated that talking with colleagues helped provide reassurance that they were not 
alone in the challenges they faced.

Induction teachers perceived that there were some challenges they faced as 
participants of the learning community. Challenges included: 1) the many demands on 
their time made it hard to find the time to write reflections and responses, 2) the limited 
time the class met resulted in some lack of continuity, 3) my role as co-facilitator made it 
more difficult for some of the participants 4) teachers had differing needs which were not 
all met using a single approach. Therefore, induction teachers should be offered choices 
so that they can help shape their experiences to meet their learning needs. Teachers also 
need opportunities to communicate and interact with other participants in between class 
meetings to help build relationships and continuity within the induction program.
Dedicated to:

My Husband
and my Family
With love and appreciation for all of your support and encouragement
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who helped me through this journey. A special thanks goes to my advisor, Dr. Stephen Pape, for his support and encouragement. I appreciate his commitment to my learning and the many hours he invested on my behalf thoughtfully reading my work and offering constructive suggestions for improvement. I have learned and grown professionally as a result of his efforts.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Educators and education researchers have long recognized the importance of teacher reflection as a means to foster teachers’ growth in their professional practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997; Moon, 1999; Boud, 2001; Loughran, 2002). Dewey (1933) wrote about the importance of “reflective thinking as an educational aim” (p. 17), and this kind of reflection has been described as purposeful and directed toward the solution of a problem (Moon, 1999). Although there is considerable research literature on the topic, it is very hard to articulate an explanation for how this kind of reflection occurs, and it has not been something that has been able to be taught to others (Schon, 1983). This kind of reflection involves thinking about the past, the current situation, and the future. While truly reflective teachers are sometimes referred to as master teachers, educators have not found a way to effectively “teach” that practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983).

As an educator who has taught for fifteen years and has been a practicing building principal for an additional nine years, I have worked with many new teachers as they have entered the profession of teaching, as well as many other induction teachers (defined as teachers who are starting their first year of teaching in a new district) who have started their work in my building with limited experience from other settings. Both my former
position as an elementary principal and my current position as a middle school principal have been in two suburban school districts that served growing student populations. In each case, I hired a large number of teachers, including beginning and experienced teachers, that made up more than half of my respective building staffs. While some of those teachers had very positive experiences in their initial year, others have struggled and dealt with many stresses as they worked through their first year of teaching in those school districts. As a result, I have become very interested in how I can support the work and professional growth of these beginning teachers within a new context.

Based on my observations and discussions with my own staff in these two settings, I have learned that when teachers start new positions, they are often overwhelmed with all they have to learn and find themselves working day-to-day, focused on what is coming next with a goal of staying on top of things and keeping problems to a minimum. This was especially true of first year teachers; however, experienced teachers faced some of the same struggles, although often to a lesser degree. In many of these situations, the teachers entered a survival mode, trying to keep their head above water to make it through one day at a time. If a district’s goal for new staff is to help support them as they work toward improved teaching and learning, then survival mode falls far short of that goal.

As a building principal and a district administrator I am convinced that we must do more to help support true professional growth and development of our induction teachers. Instead of watching our new staff members struggle to get through that first year in survival mode, we need to set a goal to help them continue their learning
(Feiman-Nemser, 2003). This can be done by creating a learning community where induction teachers work together collaboratively to support their own growth and learning as reflective practitioners (Carver, 2004; Cady, 1998).

It is critical that we support the development of teachers’ ability to work as reflective problem-solvers that continue to learn as they assess their own practice and make changes in an effort to improve teaching and learning. Administrators must take a more active role in providing these practitioners with the opportunity to engage in reflection and collaborative dialogue that will help them successfully mediate their learning and growth. Induction programs can provide the setting and the opportunity to create a learning community that fosters teacher reflection and learning within a collaborative setting (Carver, 2004; Cady, 1998).

In recent years the use of entry year programs, district induction programs, and the assignment of mentors to first year teachers have become valued and accepted practices (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005; Kelley, 2004). Induction programs are often set up with a goal of providing teachers with emotional support during their adjustment to new positions (Feiman-Nemser, 2003) and can be helpful to teachers as they become more comfortable in their new roles, get to know others, and learn about the resources that are available in their buildings and districts (Kelley, 2004). Although those goals are important, they are shortsighted and very limited in terms of providing the kind of support new teachers need to become reflective practitioners and active problem solvers in their classrooms (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Educational leaders need to be more
proactive in planning induction programs that go beyond emotional support and set a goal to promote and continue induction-year teachers’ learning.

Feiman-Nemser (2003) states, “we misrepresent the process of learning to teach when we consider new teachers as finished products” (p. 26), yet that is what has traditionally been done in the past. Instead we need to recognize that as teachers enter our buildings to start or continue their practice, they are not finished products, but are entering a new phase of their learning. Induction programs should therefore be set up with a goal of helping teachers continue their learning and growth as reflective practitioners. They can do this by providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and revisit their teaching in an effort to improve it. This process has been called reflection-on-action and has been seen as a crucial means of professional growth (Schon, 1983).

New teachers report that assistance from colleagues is one of the most beneficial forms of support they can receive (Gilbert, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Grant & Zeichner; 1981), and the literature on professional development supports providing teachers with opportunities to engage in ongoing conversations with their colleagues about the work of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Collaboration with colleagues has also been shown to increase the likelihood that a teacher will be successfully reflective (Glazer, Abbott, & Harris, 2004). Therefore, as educational leaders we need to structure opportunities for induction teachers to work collaboratively with others to learn the process of reflecting in and on action. With that goal in mind, we need to explore a vision for teacher induction programs that involves developing learning communities that
support teachers’ collaborative efforts to dialogue about their practice and reflect on their teaching in an effort to improve. In addition, we need to model those practices and provide the structures, tools, and activities that will scaffold and support induction teachers as they learn the “artistry” (Schon, 1983) of effective reflective problem solving that results in improved teaching and learning.

Induction programs have been promoted as a means of supporting and developing an attitude of life-long learning in teachers (Wong, 2002); however, they often fall short of meeting that goal (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Induction programs provide an opportunity for a district’s new teachers to meet on a regular basis, yet they vary in scope. These meetings are often held before the school year starts and sometimes continue through the course of the school year. They are often structured to provide basic information to teachers in order to help them adjust to their new setting. These programs, however, vary in their content, substance and quality (Kelley, 2004), and many of them provide only limited types of assistance through district orientations. Too often the induction program ends up being little more than a sharing of the school or district’s rules, policies or procedures (McCann, Johannessen & Ricca, 2005). These efforts seem to have a goal of supporting teachers in getting through their first year, which is far less than what we want to accomplish. This type of survival-based induction program is a missed opportunity for authentic teacher learning. Higher expectations need to be set for our teacher induction programs by using what we know about teaching and learning to craft a new vision for them as a vehicle for teacher growth and development.
Statement of the Problem

One of most difficult aspects about teaching lies in the fact that many of the problems encountered in teachers’ daily practice may be situations that teachers have had no training or experience to deal with (Schon, 1983). Each classroom presents its own challenges and every teacher has a unique group of students who have their own specific academic, emotional, and social needs. Every induction year teacher will be faced daily with new and unique challenges. In addition, each teacher brings his or her own family and cultural background, educational history and life experiences that have shaped their own view of who they are and what they define good teaching to be (Greene, 1978; Palmer, 1998).

As teachers take on the many roles and responsibilities of a new position, they can easily become overwhelmed. There are hundreds of decisions that must be made each day and there is often no clear “right” answer. As teachers struggle to make these decisions, they are often not able to take the time to slow down or stop to reflect on their teaching. They simply do not often perceive that they have enough time to reflect on their practice. While administrators may look for opportunities to encourage reflection among teachers, the time they are delegated for teacher in-service training is very limited. An induction program, however, can be structured to provide teachers with opportunities for reflection as they collaborate with their colleagues and discuss their practice. The goal for this kind of induction program would be to promote learning as teachers reflect on their practice, both during their teaching and after it, through reflection in and on action (Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997). It is critical that we raise our standards and expectations for teacher
induction programs to create a learning community environment that fosters teacher growth.

The challenge, therefore, becomes one of how to structure induction programs to encourage collaborative and reflective practice. The research literature suggests several processes that can be used including: action research, journal writing, case study, supervision, and classroom discussions (Moon, 1999; Valli, 1997). Reflective writing can be used to encourage teacher reflection (Boud, 2001; Carter, 1998) and interactive and reciprocal journal writing has also been used as a tool to build relationships between the participants and promote learning (Tillman, 2003; Dillard, 1996). Different combinations of those processes have been studied; however, there is no generally accepted way to foster teacher reflection.

New teachers are typically eager to learn and are looking for opportunities to interact with their colleagues, mentors, and administrators (Gilbert, 2005; Carver, 2004; Johnson & Kardos, 2002). Collaboration with colleagues is essential for personal learning (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991); therefore, experienced teachers who are starting their work in a new setting also benefit by having time to talk to their peers about their practice. Quality professional development takes place when teachers are engaged in serious, ongoing conversations about their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and collaboration increases the likelihood that teachers will be successfully reflective (Glazer et al, 2004). Induction programs, therefore, when viewed as professional development, need to provide teachers with structured opportunities to engage in conversations with their colleagues about their practice.
It is a common practice to assign a mentor to a district’s new teachers, and while those mentors serve a purpose, these practices can be more powerful when coupled with opportunities to support induction teachers’ learning. Induction programs provide a unique opportunity to meet with both beginning and experienced teachers over an extended period of time, and could be structured to include specific processes or activities to create an environment that will foster and encourage reflection (Moon, 1999; Valli, 1997). Typically, district administrators and building principals are involved with new teachers during the hiring process and then again as they make their classroom assignments, assign teachers their mentors and introduce them to their team and other staff members. From that point on, however, the administration’s role may be somewhat limited in terms of the actual time that is spent with the teacher discussing how to become more skilled at teaching (Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002). If administrators are going to focus on helping induction teachers learn, they must structure situations for learning that will enable them to accomplish that task. That involves specifically planning an activity setting where that focus is present and skilled experts are there to guide the participation of the teacher learners (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Induction programs provide a valuable opportunity for ongoing professional development that can continue throughout the teachers’ first year with the district. Time is one of the most valuable commodities teachers have, so it is imperative that educators and administrators investigate new ways to structure the time that is available in teacher induction programs. As part of that process, it is also imperative that educators explore new ways for building and district leaders to be more actively involved in guiding
induction teachers through the process of collaborative reflection to foster teacher learning.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the perceived needs of induction teachers through the development and implementation of a responsive induction program that was structured as a learning community. The study specifically sought to answer these questions:

1. Which components of the induction class were perceived by the teachers as being helpful in fostering their growth and learning as reflective teachers?
2. What do participants perceive are the benefits of their participation in this learning community that is focused on reflection?
3. What do participants perceive are the challenges of their participation in this learning community?
4. How do the participants perceive the use of reflective strategies will impact their future use of these strategies in their teaching?

Sociocultural Perspective

A sociocultural perspective views learning as a social enterprise (Phillips & Soltis, 2004) and attempts to understand mental functioning in terms of “contextually situated processes” (Wertsch, 1990). Using this view, thinking and learning are not viewed as processes that are individually situated, but instead are examined in relation to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they occur. Vygotsky argued that learning and higher-level thinking processes develop “through enculturation into the practices of society” (Moll, 1990, p. 1). This perspective will provide the framework for this study, which will be organized around the sociocultural concepts of situated learning,
apprenticeship and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990); communication, tools for mediation, and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978); peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991); and communities of practice and the issues of identity and power that are associated with them (Wenger, 1998).

**Situated Learning**

Every educational setting is a social creation (Moll, 1990). Teachers cannot be studied in isolation because the social activity within the school context provides the means for the teachers to acquire the skills and knowledge that is valued by that group. Therefore, it is critically important to realize that we cannot separate a teacher’s teaching from the social context of the school, the classroom, the staff, the students and the community. We also cannot assume that an induction teacher’s success will depend solely on their own knowledge and ability, but must instead explore how we can support those teachers in forming new relationships with expert or skilled others within the context of the school and community.

Teachers’ learning, therefore, includes more than acquiring the knowledge of content or learning the pedagogy of teaching; it also includes the interactive social relations of people with their environment (Wenger, 1998). Induction teachers come to their new position with knowledge, skills, and experiences related to teaching, but their on-the-job learning will be a new kind of learning that is integrally tied to the social context of their school and their district. This will involve their interactions with students, parents, and staff as well and their interaction with the environment in which they work.
Apprenticeship

Rogoff (1990) expands the social theory of learning by using the concept of apprenticeship to emphasize her view that the learner is an active participant in the learning process. Her model of apprenticeship is “one of active learners in a community of people who support, challenge, and guide novices as they increasingly participate in skilled, valued, sociocultural activity.” (p. 39). Although the model of apprenticeship is more typically described in terms of children’s cognitive development, it can also be applied to adults as they develop skills and understanding as well. The apprenticeship analogy is therefore helpful in describing the process whereby teachers who are new to a school and district learn, not only through their own work in their classrooms, but through their participation and work with others such as teammates, mentors, students, and colleagues in a teacher induction class.

Shared problem solving is seen as central to the process of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). This process involves “an active learner participating in culturally organized activity with a more skilled partner” (p. 39). Problem solving is also seen as an important component of reflection and is central to the process of thinking and learning (Dewey, 1933). Working with others collaboratively to discuss issues and reflect on problems concerning a teacher’s own practice can thereby be seen as a powerful form of apprenticeship.

As part of the apprenticeship process verbal and nonverbal communication serve as powerful tools to help teachers develop intersubjectivity, or a shared perspective, with other teachers and administrators as they mediate the new environments in their
classrooms, schools and districts. This shared perspective helps to build a “bridge between one understanding and another” (Rogoff, p. 71) as these teachers learn within the different relationships they share with others in the social context of the school setting. Through this process they will learn and come to understand and internalize the goals and values of the school and community (Vygotsky, 1978; Gallimore & Tharpe, 1990). Therefore, it is important to structure at least some of those social activities to provide the opportunities and means for learning to occur (Moon, 1999; Gallimore & Tharpe, 1990).

**Guided Participation**

Guided participation can be defined as active learning in the context of sociocultural activity, with the guidance of more skilled partners (Rogoff, 1990). Guided participation is central to the concept of apprenticeship and is the process whereby the learner works with a skilled partner to reach new understandings that build upon their previous learning. The term *guided participation* can be used to describe the induction teachers’ work with skilled others as they enter their new setting (Rogoff, 1990). This definition is therefore very useful in looking at how new teachers, as apprentices, develop their skills in teaching, as well as an understanding of the goals and values that are inherently present and at least tacitly understood by their colleagues in their school settings. In this model, guided participation provides the means for the learner to be involved in shared problem solving with others as they work through many of the day-to-day problems they encounter in their classrooms. As they interact with various skilled partners, this guided participation can take many different forms, depending on the school and district culture.
Social referencing is also important to apprenticeship as the learners look to those around them to help them make sense of their surroundings (Rogoff, 1990). Teachers pick up information through conversations and through other verbal and nonverbal cues as they try to work through solving the everyday problems that they encounter as they get to know the daily routines and practices of the school setting. Sometimes that problem solving may be based on issues of how to improve teaching and learning, however, the time structures within the school day often limit the amount of in-depth problem solving and dialogue that teachers can have with their colleagues on those issues. A teacher induction class can provide one setting where those conversations can take place.

*Speech and Communication as Tools for Mediation*

As teachers engage in social referencing, communication becomes a means to mediate their environment and their interactions with others. Vygotsky placed a significant emphasis on the nature of social interactions (Moll, 1990). When describing mediation, his main emphasis was on speech, which he considered the sign system for human communication (Wertsch, 1990). Speech and language are important and useful tools for thinking and communicating; however, the concept of communication can be expanded to include verbal and nonverbal communication as well (Rogoff, 1990). Using this interpretation, verbal and nonverbal communication are important tools that will help induction teachers as they mediate and make meaning of a new setting. As these apprentice teachers interact with skilled others in different ways, they will use communication as a means to help make sense of their new surroundings and experiences. As induction teachers gradually learn what is valued in their new settings the
new knowledge is internalized and it is through this process that teachers learn both the explicit and implicit norms and values of their school, district, and classroom. An induction program can provide one setting where this learning can occur, so both written and verbal communication need to be incorporated so that the teachers can use them as tools to mediate their new environment.

Zone of Proximal Development

It is also useful to examine the teacher as a learner to better understand how that process works. Each teacher functions within his or her zone of proximal development (ZPD). The concept of the ZPD was first used to describe how children can perform beyond their actual developmental level with the assistance of others (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky proposed that children have an actual developmental level, as well as “a level of potential development which can be determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The ZPD is then described as the difference between the two.

Although Vygotsky (1978) applies the zone of proximal development to children’s learning, Tharp and Gallimore (1988, as cited in Gallimore & Tharp, 1990) note that,

Teaching consists of assisting performance through the zone of proximal development. Thus teaching can be said to occur at that point in the zone where performance can be achieved with assistance. Teachers, like their students, have zones of proximal development; they too require assisted performance” (p. 200).

The ZPD extends in many different directions (Tudge, 1990) and evidence of that can be seen in the many dimensions of a teacher’s work as an educator. Induction teachers are learning to work with many different students who represent a wide range of needs. They are also mediating or negotiating a new environment as they begin their
work within their school and district, and develop relationships with students and families, as well as with colleagues and administrators.

Using this perspective, induction teachers can be viewed as learners who bring with them their own history, background, education, social, and cultural experiences that shape their view of themselves and who they are as teachers (Greene, 1978; Palmer, 1998). Knowing this, and using the views of Vygotsky (1978), induction-year teachers can also be seen as learners with their own ZPD. Therefore, it becomes important to recognize that as teachers start their work in a new setting, they will be shaped and influenced not only by who they are, but also by the relationships they develop, and the learning they are involved in as they work with others. It is within those social interactions that new teachers receive the help of skilled others to assist them in their learning. In light of that fact and the fact that we have not discovered how to teach new teachers the “art” of reflective practice (Schon, 1983), it is important to examine the social contexts of schools, and specifically induction programs, to investigate how we might foster learning within the teacher’s ZPD.

The induction year can be a time of great learning for induction-year teachers (Wayne et al, 2005), which would suggest that this provides a great opportunity for those who plan induction programs. With the right kind of planning, induction programs can enrich and possibly even accelerate the learning of induction-year teachers by providing with planned opportunities to interact with colleagues and other skilled teachers or administrators. Educational leaders need to make it a priority to plan for those learning experiences and not leave them to chance (Moon, 1999). By providing induction teachers
with collegial opportunities and experiences to foster reflection, district and building administrators can help to support their learning by assisting their performance through their ZPD.

*Legitimate Peripheral Participation*

As skilled others assist induction teachers’ performance within their ZPD, those teachers are also involved in a larger social context. Learning is a situated activity where learners participate in communities of practice and where “mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Therefore, induction-year teachers can be seen as apprentices who are learning from skilled experts as they increasingly participate in the social practices of the community. The term legitimate peripheral participation can be used to describe that process whereby newcomers enter the community on its periphery and gradually begin to take on the skills of the experts as they move toward full participation in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, induction teachers can be seen as newcomers who are working to become full participating members of their school and district community. As they enter the new environment they will work with others and interact with all aspects of their environment as part of the learning process. This can be seen as a form of apprenticeship as the teachers learn through their interactions with skilled experts in the community.

Learning is therefore integrated with social practice and the two are inseparable. This is consistent with the concept that all induction teachers, regardless of their level of
experience, have a steep learning curve their first year (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) as they come to understand the goals and values that are important to the community. In addition, they must go through a learning process to fully understand their role in their classroom, as well as their role within their team, their building and their district. Teachers need a great deal of support to make sure that they can successfully navigate the transition as they move from peripheral participation in their community to that of a fully participating member. When that support is not present the teacher may not be able to successfully transition into full participation into the community. Building and district leaders need to evaluate how induction programs can be better used to support teachers’ learning.

Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) has expanded the concepts of apprenticeship and situated learning even further to suggest that learning be looked at more broadly as “changing participation and identity formation in a community of practice” (p. 11). Learning is looked at as the process by which a person negotiates meaning within the various communities of practice to which he or she may belong. Using this concept, newly hired teachers can be seen as members of various communities of practice as they work with their colleagues within their teams, departments, buildings, and any other groups with which they regularly interact.

In this study, I am proposing that a yearlong teacher induction class be studied as a community of practice. The induction class will have a focus on learning and reflection and the teachers will be provided with the opportunity to work collaboratively with their colleagues and the class facilitators to help shape the class. A community of practice has
three important components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Since these three components are critical to the success of the learning community they are each described below.

*Mutual engagement.* The first component that needs to be present in the induction class learning community is mutual engagement. Mutual engagement exists when “people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). That means that all participants must work together on the goals and work of the community. It is a collaborative approach engaging all participants in meaningful work, rather than a top-down venture where one person imparts knowledge to others. Significant effort is required to transform mutual engagement into a community of practice and to maintain the community (Wenger, 1998). In the past, our district’s teacher induction program had a fairly minimal level of mutual engagement. The teachers came together to participate in activities and hear speakers, but they did not have much opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with each other. When planning for the induction class in the present study, steps were taken to increase the level of mutual engagement by providing teachers with collaborative opportunities to talk to their colleagues and reflect on their practice.

Participation and reification are two processes that are often interwoven and occur together through mutual engagement as participants negotiate meaning (Wenger, 1998). Both of these processes are seen as fundamental to the negotiation of meaning in a community of practice. Wenger describes participation as the social experience of taking part in social enterprises, but emphasized that it also involves the relations with others.
that occur as part of that process. Reification is described as the process of “giving form to our experience” by creating “points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized” (p. 58). To shape the culture of a community of practice as a learning community, it is important to support strong mutual engagement by providing opportunities for participation that involve various kinds of social interactions and relationships. Through that process, as decisions are made, reification will occur as the community negotiates meaning and shapes its practice. In the teacher induction class opportunities for engagement include different types of group discussions, dialogue, and journal writing. Providing a variety of opportunities for collegial interaction and participation will help to increase the level of mutual engagement while allowing for new and different ways to negotiate meaning.

*Joint enterprise.* The second element of a community of practice is joint enterprise. There are three factors that need to be present for joint enterprise to foster a community of practice. There must first be a collective process of negotiation among the participants in the community. Second, the participants collectively must determine the enterprise. Third, joint enterprise must create relationships of mutual accountability among the participants. Many new teacher induction programs, including my district’s, have traditionally had a goal of helping new teachers successfully transition into and through their first year of teaching in a school and district (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Those programs have typically been designed with very little teacher input. True joint enterprise, however, is the result of a “collaborative process of negotiation” and is “defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77).
Thus, the teacher induction course was structured so that the teachers could have a role in the decision-making process.

*Shared repertoire.* The third element of a community of practice is the development of a shared repertoire to provide community coherence. This means that, “…over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 82). Through this process the group develops the skills and language that is relevant to the community. As Wenger states,

The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice. (1998, p. 83)

Therefore, the teachers and facilitators of the induction class work together within the community of practice they create their own way of functioning. The communication of its members, and the activities in which they engage, become shaped by the group and become part of the community of practice. As the facilitators and teachers work collectively to shape the group’s purpose and goals for learning, the process is used to develop a shared repertoire and a shared history. This repertoire will be the compilation and result of the many decisions that are made by the class and its participants. For example, in this study the induction class participants were involved in making decisions about the class format, groups they wanted to meet with, topics for writing and discussion, and the colleagues with whom they would share their writing. The reflective writing process, as well as the discussions, the readings, the problems shared, and the class’s way of doing things all became part of the shared repertoire of this class.
**Issues of Identity**

Involvement in communities of practice also plays an important role in the development of identity because each participant has a stake in the process and it “becomes part of who they are” (Wenger, 1998, p. 97). Building an identity involves “negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities” (Wenger, p. 145). The shaping of a person’s identity is related to two different aspects, their identification with the community in terms of their “modes of belonging” (p. 173) and their negotiability, or ability to contribute and help shape the meanings that matter to the community.

Using this model, newly hired teachers can be viewed as newcomers to the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). In fact, they may be newcomers to many different communities of practice, as they work with their colleagues on their teams, and within their grade levels, departments and buildings. Every community of practice has its own set of values and goals, and each induction teacher will have to form his or her own identity within that community. The induction teachers’ sense of identity will therefore be shaped at least in part by how they identify and contribute to each of those settings. For example, one issue by which members of a community of practice define themselves involves their participation, or lack of participation, in their community. Newcomers to a community often stay on the periphery of the community; however, their identity may be shaped by a positive perception of everyone in the community to view them as someone who will have full participation in the future. On the other hand, when a newcomer or long-standing member of a community is kept in a peripheral or marginal position and is
never fully engaged or accepted, it can also have a significant impact on the shaping of the individual’s identity as well. Extreme cases can result in the newcomer leaving the community and profession. Therefore, membership and modes of belonging can be very instrumental in shaping the identity of a newcomer to the community in both positive and negative ways (Wenger, 1998). If the community is constructed to include mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire, the teachers will feel a bond with the group. This sense of belonging will also contribute to the development of their own identities as they become fully participating members of the community of practice.

Learning Communities

The job of teaching is overwhelming in nature, therefore, newly hired teachers who are developing their identity must be provided the support of a strong induction program that is not limited to the assignment of a mentor and providing support through the teachers’ first year with the district. Instead, the induction program needs to be modeled as a community of practice with a focus on learning. A true learning community has learning as its central focus (Wenger, 1998), which may imply that it be constructed so that teachers are actively engaged in reflection on their practice. Using what we have learned about professional development, we need to provide teachers with opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations with their colleagues about their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In addition, care must be taken to give teachers the opportunity to provide their input into determining what kinds of discussions and activities would be most helpful to them (Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Wayne et al, 2005). In other words, as
our teachers’ instruction needs to be personalized to meet the needs of their students, our induction programs must be personalized to meet the needs of our teachers.

Learning can be viewed as a “characteristic of practice” (Wenger, 1998); therefore, when a community of practice is sustaining mutual engagement in pursuing an enterprise together it can be a source of significant learning. When this is done well, that can lead to the development of a true learning community, with learning as its core and central focus. That needs to be the goal for an induction class so that the learning community can support the learning of the individual teachers.

As educational leaders develop a teacher induction program they must consider how they can incorporate the key characteristics of a highly effective community of practice to work toward the development of a learning community that is focused on teacher learning and reflection. The structure and setting needs to be carefully constructed so that the participants of this community of practice can focus their learning on how to be a reflective practitioner and a successful and contributing member of various school communities of practice. It will also be important to consider how to develop a history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise within the time limitations that are in place for a district induction program.

Gallimore and Tharpe (1990) state that school settings must be designed so that their social organization will foster the teaching and learning of all their members. They also emphasize that to promote assisted performance in schools, supervisors should create new activity settings where “collaboration, interaction, intersubjectivity, assisted performance…and teaching occurs” (p. 189). An induction program presents one such
activity setting that is already in place in many districts. Induction programs have the potential to become activity settings that are purposefully designed and structured to foster the collaborative teaching and learning of induction teachers as part of a learning community.

Induction Programs

It is encouraging that induction programs are being offered with much more frequency in recent years, with more than 80% of beginning teachers reporting some kind of involvement in teacher induction programs (Wayne et al, 2005; Ingersoll, 2004). Those programs, however, vary in structure and quality and there is often a “mismatch between the needs of these new teachers and the support they received” (Johnson & Kardos, 2002, p. 13). Therefore, for a teacher induction experience to be meaningful it will be important that participating teachers have a genuine voice in informing the work, by providing them with input into planning the class and sharing their opinions and feedback during the course of the year. In addition, it will also be critical that these teachers be able to develop a sense of trust with all participants that will allow them to comfortably share their written reflections with both their class facilitators and their classmates. An open and trusting atmosphere within the class meetings will also be necessary so that the participants feel that the class represents a safe space for talking about their work.

For an induction program to be effective, care must be taken to closely monitor the changing needs of the teachers by providing them with non-threatening and anonymous ways to provide feedback during the program’s implementation over the
course of the school year and after its completion. In addition, facilitators must have a system to use that information to make changes or adjustments to the course agenda. Follow-up studies would also be helpful in providing data on long-term results.

Clearly, there is a genuine need to explore new opportunities to promote teacher learning, especially in the first induction years that can be so overwhelming. Building leaders must make it a priority to structure opportunities for learning and seek honest teacher feedback that will inform future practice. Power issues will inherently be present, but we must work to overcome them by building an atmosphere of trust where teachers can comfortably reflect on their practice and work collaboratively with others toward improvement. The power of the community of practice itself provides hope for that vision. Even when those power issues are recognized, “the power, benevolent or malevolent, that institutions, prescriptions, or individuals have over the practice of a community is always mediated by the community’s production of its practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 80). If the community of learners embraces this goal for learning and sustains a high level of mutual engagement as it works collaboratively toward joint enterprise, a learning community with a genuine focus on teacher learning is possible.

Prior Work with the Induction Class

The process of collaborative reflection presents an exciting area for further research as a means of fostering teacher learning in a community of practice. Through the course of my five years as a middle school principal, I have worked to promote meaningful dialogue among teachers and build an environment that fosters collaboration across teams and departments. During the last three years I have worked with the new
teacher induction class as a co-facilitator with my district’s personnel director and four lead mentors. As I have worked with this group, I have developed an interest in researching how new teacher induction programs can be used as a vehicle to promote teacher learning. My previous work with the teacher induction class during the 2003-2004 school year led to the development of a pilot study that was implemented during the 2004-2005 school year. The findings of that pilot study were then used to inform this dissertation study, which was implemented during the 2005-2006 school year. It is therefore important to consider the pilot study, and how it informs the current work.

The Pilot Study

Teacher development has been an area of interest to me in my practice as both an elementary and middle school principal. In my current position as a middle school principal I expressed interest and was given the opportunity to work with my personnel director and four lead mentors to participate in facilitating the new teacher induction class. As I became more involved with the group, and more interested in the challenges induction teachers faced, I wanted to learn more about how we, as a district, could support their work.

During the 2003-2004 school year I developed an anonymous survey instrument for induction teachers and their mentors to find out what they felt were the most challenging aspects of their first year of teaching in our district. The surveys were separated into those of beginning teachers (in their first or second full year of teaching), and experienced teachers and were analyzed for common themes. Some of the most difficult challenges beginning teachers faced included discipline and classroom
management issues, parent issues, how to best help their special needs students, and how to meet the specific needs of the wide range of students in their classrooms. Teachers in the class suggested an emphasis on these topics in future induction classes.

Following the conclusion of the class in spring, 2004, I shared the results of the study with our personnel director and expressed an interest in conducting a pilot study during the 2004-2005 school year. The purpose of the study was to involve the induction teachers in reflective writing as part of the class and to examine whether that process would be perceived to be helpful in working through the challenges of their first year of teaching in our district. With the help of my advisor I devised a pilot study that would engage the induction teachers in journal writing to try to encourage the process of teacher reflection. In addition to reading a common text, Thomas Lickona’s *Character Matters*, the induction teachers who chose to take the class for graduate credit and volunteered to participate in the pilot study were also required to write a total of five reflective journal entries and share a final project presentation.

The purpose of the study was to analyze the teachers’ reflections to look for thematic patterns and to investigate how this writing did or did not impact the teachers in their practice. In addition, teachers were asked about whether or not they felt the practice helped them in the process of becoming a reflective teacher. I read and responded to all five reflections and returned them to the teachers before the next class meeting. I also interviewed one volunteer first-year teacher twice that year, about midway during the year, and at the end of the year after the class was completed. Informal conversations with the participants also informed my work.
Questions that Guided the Pilot Study

Questions that guided the pilot study were: What were the teachers’ perceptions about the reflective journal writing process? Did these perceptions change over time? How did teachers construct their learning through the reflective journal writing process? How did they feel they were impacted by their participation in this process? What impact, if any, did they feel this process had on their teaching? Did the teachers believe that they would continue this process in any form in the future? Why or why not?

How the Pilot Study Informs the Current Work

The pilot study has informed my current work and led me to the development of the dissertation study that was conducted during the 2005-2006 school year. Preliminary data from the interviews and reflections indicated that the teachers valued reflection; it is not clear whether they valued its importance as a result of the study, or whether they did so prior to its start. Therefore, I determined that I would need to establish some baseline data to explore participants’ views on reflections before the start of the study and better assess changes over time in relation to the teacher’s view of reflective thinking.

The literature suggests that journal writing can help develop relationships between the writer and the reader (Dillard, 1996; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Tillman, 2003), and my pilot study confirmed this for at least some of the participants. I was able to develop a deeper relationship with the participating teachers than with those who were not involved in the reflective writing process. I also developed stronger relationships with those teachers who worked in my own building than those from the other buildings. Therefore,
I decided to have all members of the class participate in the reflective writing process as part of the dissertation study.

I also noticed that my relationship was clearly stronger with those teachers who worked in my building. Therefore, in an attempt to develop more intersubjectivity with all participants (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990), I added a component to the present study where I would also be involved in writing reflective journal entries, and would give each student a copy at each class meeting. I believed that would provide me with an opportunity to model the reflective writing process (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Costa & Kallick, 2000) and would give me a chance to have interactive reflective dialogue with all class participants. I also hoped that it would help the participants get to know me better and develop a trusting relationship with me so that they could feel safe in writing to me.

I structured the class so that all participants would respond to my writing, and I would, in turn, respond to theirs. In that way I planned to expand the study in a new direction to investigate the impact of my own journal writing on our relationship, the reflective writing process, and the participants’ teaching and professional practice. I also wanted to examine whether the teachers were planning to continue the practice of reflection in any form in the future.

Although my pilot study focused specifically on the reflective journal writing, for my dissertation study I made plans to expand the scope of the study to examine the teachers’ participation in the induction class as a whole. The results of my pilot study, as well as my continued reading of the research, challenged me to consider examining the
teacher induction class as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). I specifically viewed the class as an opportunity to work collaboratively with newly hired teachers to create a learning community with a focus on guided reflection to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, the literature related to designing structured opportunities for reflection (Moon, 1999; Valli, 1997), using journal writing as a strategy to promote reflective thinking in the class settings (Carter, 1998; Boud, 2001; Zeichner & Liston, 1996, Bain et al, 2002, Spalding & Wilson, 2002), and reciprocal journal writing (Dillard, 1996; Tillman, 2003) was especially helpful for planning this class.

I structured reflective reciprocal journal writing into the course and determined that I would seek the teachers’ input before making any further decisions about the class format and topics. I also decided to administer a background information survey form to provide participants with an opportunity to share their preferences for class format and discussion topics. This information would then be used to help plan the class agenda.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ perceived needs within a responsive induction program that has been structured as a learning community. This study builds upon the current research on teacher reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997; Moon, 1999; Boud, 2001; Loughran, 2002) and induction programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Gilbert, 2005; Wayne et al, 2005; Cady, 1998). Specifically, it seeks to extend the research that has examined efforts to create opportunities for practicing teachers to work within a class or group setting with the purpose of enhancing reflective practice (Dillard, 1998; Moon, 1999; Boud, 2001;
Tillman, 2003). The primary purpose of this study was to learn more about the perceived needs of the induction teachers, both beginning teachers and their more experienced colleagues, through the development of a responsive induction program that was structured as a learning community.

In order to create a learning community (Wenger, 1998; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; DuFour & Eaker, 1998) that fosters reflection, the conditions must be conducive to reflection (Moon, 1999). Therefore, as part of this study, I worked collaboratively with the teachers to create a community of learners that shared common values and goals for learning reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Moon (1999) states that the best guide for reflection involves the structure of the task. As part of the class, the teachers of the learning community read about reflection, talked about it, and used interactive reflective journal writing as a way to document their thinking about the reflection and problem-solving work they did in their classrooms.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ perceived needs within a responsive induction program that has been structured as a learning community. Relevant to this study is the literature in the following areas: teacher induction programs, needs of induction teachers, professional development, reflective teaching, journal writing, trust, teacher empowerment, and learning communities.

Teacher Induction Programs

In recent years there has been a growing interest in teacher induction programs and they have become accepted and valued (Wayne et al, 2005; Kelley, 2004) as a way to provide emotional support to newly hired teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). They also help those teachers get to know their colleagues, become comfortable in their new roles, and learn about the resources that are available in their districts (Kelley, 2004). These programs are being offered with much more frequency in recent years, with more than 80% of beginning teachers reporting some kind of involvement in new teacher induction programs (Wayne et al, 2005; Ingersoll, 2004). These programs, however, vary in quality and content and there is often a “mismatch between the needs of these new teachers and the support they received” (Johnson & Kardos, 2002).
Induction programs vary in structure and class content. Some existing induction programs are set up as an orientation for all new staff, which often consists of one or more meetings about district’s rules, policies and procedures. In contrast to that kind of single shot orientation, an effective induction program provides teacher support throughout the first year (McCann et al, 2005). The structure of induction programs also varies in terms of the participants. In many districts the induction program is specifically designed to help beginning teachers transition through their first year of teaching. In those situations, newly hired teachers who have prior experience may not be required to participate in anything beyond an initial meeting or orientation to the district. In other districts, the induction program may be structured to include all newly hired teachers, regardless of their level of experience. The induction program that was the focus of this study included both first-year teachers and experienced veterans who were newly employed by the district for the 2005-2006 school year. The induction program also included an initial two-day orientation and seven additional class sessions that were held throughout the course of the school year.

Concerns of Beginning Teachers

New teachers often feel overwhelmed and burdened with trying to make it through their first year of their new position (Millinger, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Teacher attrition in the early years is clearly a serious issue (Ingersoll, 1997; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) and new teachers in urban settings continue to leave the profession in alarming numbers (Carver, 2004). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and Teacher
Follow-up Survey indicate that after just five years between 40 and 50 percent of teachers have left the profession (Ingersoll, 2003). Of those beginning teachers who left the profession, 19% cited that they left due to school staffing action such as layoffs, cutbacks, school reorganization or termination and another 42% cited personal reasons. Of the remaining teachers who left, 39% said they left to pursue a better job or a different career, and 29% cited their dissatisfaction with their specific job or with teaching as a career. This information is a clear indication that we need to do more to help support and retain our teachers, especially during the first few years of their practice.

Historically, induction programs in this country have not provided intensive professional development for beginning teachers (Wong, Britton, & Ganser, 2005), and first-year teachers are often left in isolation to work through the challenges within their own classrooms. Most of these new teachers have never set up and managed a classroom without the assistance of a cooperating teacher. They are faced with applying everything they have learned to a totally new setting without the support of another teacher and are faced with new challenges on a daily basis. There are hundreds of decisions they must make and typically they have to learn through trial and error. No training can totally prepare a teacher for the experience of teaching in a classroom. As a result, many beginning teachers often feel overwhelmed (Millinger, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003) as they try to make it through their first year of teaching and figure out how to effectively teach and meet a wide range of student needs. Beginning teachers often struggle with issues regarding classroom management, organization, managing their time and
workload, relationships with students and parents, and curriculum, assessment and grading (McCann et al, 2005).

Research suggests, however, that quality induction programs can make a difference. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) used the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for 1999-2000 and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey for 2000-2001 to see what impact teachers’ participation in a formal induction program had on their practice. Results indicated that there are significant discrepancies between existing programs, ranging from schools that offer minimal induction programs with little support to schools that offer comprehensive programs with several bundled support activities. The data suggests that the most effective induction programs offer more support to new teachers and that those include providing a mentor from the same field, as well as the opportunity to participate in group or collective planning, and collaborative activities.

Educational leaders need to recognize that the induction year is a time of great learning for teachers. As Feiman-Nemser (2003) states:

We misrepresent the process of learning to teach when we consider new teachers as finished products, when we assume that they mostly need to refine existing skills, or when we treat their learning needs as signs of deficiency in their preparation” (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 26).

Therefore, educators must view beginning teachers as starting a new phase of their learning and provide them with the support of a strong induction program that goes beyond an orientation or assignment of a mentor and helps to develop and cultivate an “attitude of lifelong learning” for teachers (Wong, 2002, p. 52). A high quality induction program can provide a valuable opportunity for professional development and must be structured to support teacher learning during the formative induction year.
Needs of Induction Teachers

Gilbert (2005) examined survey data that was collected from 140 teachers in six Georgia school districts. Teachers responded to the question, “What helps beginning teachers?” (p. 36) and ranked a variety of teacher support strategies. Four of the top five responses involved spending time with other teachers. What new teachers want in their induction experience is the opportunity to talk with their experienced colleagues (Johnson & Kardos, 2002). They want more than social support and hope to find guidance from their peers. Induction teachers want to ask questions and talk through the challenges they are facing with the goal of becoming an effective teacher. Issues they wanted to discuss included curriculum and instruction, how to meet their students’ needs, how to create a safe environment in their classroom and how to engage their students in learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Another study examined the perceptions of beginning teachers and their principals regarding problems new teachers experience, their role expectations, and the assistance they receive (Brock & Grady, 1998). Surveys were completed by 49 second-year teachers, nine beginning teachers and 56 principals. Beginning teachers indicated that classroom management and discipline were their biggest concerns, followed by working with mainstreamed students, determining appropriate expectations for students, dealing with stress, and handling angry parents. The principals noted many of the same concerns and listed classroom management and discipline as the most important concerns. Beginning teachers emphasized the need to have assistance throughout the year. They
also indicated the importance of the principal’s role in the teacher induction process and identified the principal as a key source of support and guidance.

Induction programs need to go beyond helping first-year teachers survive and should be designed with a goal of helping beginning teachers learn the art of good teaching. To help novice practitioners become good teachers, “we must treat the first years of teaching as a phase in learning to teach and surround new teachers with a professional culture that supports teacher learning” (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 25). Educators must therefore meet teachers where they are in their learning as they enter the profession. Induction programs can then be used to provide additional support to help teachers continue learning from their experiences in the classroom.

Experienced induction teachers also tend to be burdened with additional stress as they engage with the challenges of a new position. They benefit from the opportunity to develop relationships and talk with their peers (Glazer et al, 2004) as they try to learn the values of the school and the district. As they work through their induction year in a new district, it is important that they be provided the support and structure they need to help continue their own learning. In order to do that, educators must recognize that experienced teachers have specific needs that are often different than those of their less experienced induction colleagues. In addition, care must be taken to give teachers the opportunity to provide their input into determining what kinds of discussions and activities would be most helpful to them (Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Wayne et al, 2005). High quality induction programs must therefore be personalized to meet the needs of teachers, just as the teachers’ instruction needs to be personalized to meet the needs of
their students. In the present study, teachers’ needs within the induction program were examined. In addition, teachers were provided with an opportunity to share their needs and class preferences and that information was used to help develop the induction program and class agenda.

Induction Programs as Professional Development

In recent years educators have recognized the need for professional development to involve teachers in ongoing work that is directly tied to their own practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Little, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Miller, 1992). Therefore, for a teacher induction program to be a meaningful form of professional development it will be important for teachers to have a genuine voice in shaping the work. As Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) state, “A prime purpose of professional development, it is argued, should therefore be to help teachers articulate their voice as a way of constructing and reconstructing the purposes and the priorities in the work, both individually and collectively” (p. 5).

Teachers need to be able to address the pressing needs of their daily work (Carver, 2004) so an induction program should be structured to provide them time to reflect on the challenges they face in their daily practice. Professional development is also continuous learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) so as teachers’ needs change they need to have access to non-threatening and anonymous ways to provide feedback that will help to direct their learning. An induction program needs to be a collaborative effort so that teachers can communicate their needs during the program’s implementation,
over the course of the school year, and after its completion. This information must also be used in a meaningful way to shape the class agenda.

High quality professional development involves ongoing conversations about teachers’ work (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), and it is critical that the induction teachers be able to develop a sense of trust with all participants (Tschannen-Moran, 2004) that will allow them to comfortably share their thoughts and written reflections with both class facilitators and colleagues. This is especially true when administrators, and specifically the teachers’ principals or evaluators, have a role in leading the course (Carver, 2004). An open and trusting atmosphere is critical for participants to feel that they have a safe space for talking about their work. The trust between individuals is greatly influenced by the social context in which the relationship is embedded (Tschannen-Moran, 2004); therefore, to establish that trust the teachers and facilitators must share a collaborative vision for accomplishing that goal.

High quality professional development also provides opportunities for teachers to collectively reflect on their teaching in an effort to work toward improvement. Collaborative groups can play a key role in this kind of reflection (Eaker, Noblit, & Rogers, 1992) as teachers collectively reflect on their teaching and students’ learning. This kind of reflective practice is a desirable outcome of professional development and will not necessarily take place if there is not time or encouragement for it to happen (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Therefore, in the present study, structured opportunities for reflection and collaboration were incorporated into the class agenda. As teachers are engaged in ongoing thoughtful conversations about teaching and learning, those
conversations occur in communities of practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The induction class that provided the setting for this study was an attempt to create one such community of practice.

Reflective Teaching

There are many definitions of reflection as it applies to education. Dewey (1933) defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6). Valli (1997) describes a reflective person as “someone who thinks back on what is seen and heard, who contemplates, who is a deliberative thinker” (p. 67). While many educators recognize the importance of teacher reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Valli, 1997; Moon, 1999; Loughran, 2002; Jay, 2004) not all thinking about teaching is necessarily reflective. Zeichner and Liston (1996) distinguish between thinking about teaching and reflecting on it in the following way. “If a teacher never questions the goals and values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching” (p. 1).

Therefore, reflective teaching goes beyond thinking about teaching. Reflective teachers go beyond thinking about their practice and begin to question their work and explore new ideas for how to improve their teaching. That process is critical to teachers as they learn through both their successes and their failures. Failure is instructive (Dewey, 1933), because as teachers recognize their limitations and failures, that often initiates the process whereby they think about what they need to do differently to address
the problem in some kind of future action. Reflective thinking that is linked to
constructive action is generally recognized as helpful to teachers as they solve the
problems they encounter in their daily practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Moon, 1999;
Valli, 1997).

Considerable research on reflective teaching resulted from the work of Donald
Schon (1983), who shared the idea that our professionals are in the midst of a “crisis of
confidence” because their professional knowledge is “mismatched to the changing
characteristics of the situations of practice” (p. 14). He describes the difficulty of new
professionals as they enter the workforce and immediately face problems and challenges
that were not addressed in their training. There are no easy answers—and no right or
wrong way to handle most of these situations—so it can be very overwhelming to a new
teacher who is faced with problems that he or she does not feel equipped to solve. This
necessarily requires a high level of adaptability on the part of the new teacher and no one
can clearly explain or describe how and why some teachers are able to effectively use
“artistic, intuitive processes” (Schon, 1983, p. 49) to reflectively solve the problems of
practice while others are much less successful in doing so.

Schon (1983) describes the kind of reflection teachers use as being reflection-in-
action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action emphasizes the reflective thinking
that occurs during practice, where teachers use ongoing assessment to evaluate their work
and make adjustments and instructional decisions while in the midst of teaching.
Reflection-on-action describes the reflective thinking that takes place after the
experiences have occurred, when teachers revisit their teaching by thinking about it in
terms of how they can improve their current or future instruction. Both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are important to the process of reflective teaching and involve the teacher in becoming a “researcher in the practice context” (Schon, 1983, p. 68).

Just as Schon emphasized that the process of reflection must be embedded in the context of the learning situation, experiential learning is a term that is used to explain the process whereby teachers observe and experience practical situations and reflect on them with the idea that their learning can lead to some kind of improved action (Moon, 1999). This cycle of experiential learning includes four components: 1) experiencing some kind of situation or action; 2) reflective observation based on that experience; 3) abstract conceptualizing; and 4) active experimentation with a goal of improvement on the original action. Reflection is an important part of this cycle, since it involves learners in actively working to solve the problems of their practice. Similarly, Loughran (2002) places emphasis on learning through questioning and investigation and defines effective reflective practice as reflection that results in insights that have an effect on practice.

Much of the discussion about reflection centers on the individual teacher’s practice. However, Zeichner and Liston (1996) build upon the previous work of Dewey and Schon by highlighting two additional important understandings. First, although reflection can be the work of an individual, they note that it is important to realize that the work of reflection can be enhanced through communication and dialogue with others. In addition, Zeichner and Liston (1996) state that reflection should not focus solely on the teacher’s work in the classroom, but also upon “the contexts in which teaching and
schooling are embedded” (p. 22). Decisions made during reflection also necessarily involve other members of the school community. These extended forms of conversation and dialogue are important to the process of reflective teaching. Therefore, in the present study, opportunities for collaborative reflection have been incorporated into the induction class.

Designing Structured Opportunities for Reflection

Although educators have established the importance of reflection in learning (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997), reflection will not necessarily take place just because it is seen to be important. Therefore, it is critical that educators carefully structure conditions to encourage reflection (Moon, 1999). In order to structure a learning environment that is conducive to teacher reflection, it has to be created with that goal in mind. The time and space has to be appropriate, and the facilitators of the environment should model reflective thinking and serve in a supportive, “counselor” type of role (p. 167). In addition, the local context, as well as that of the larger institution, needs to be supportive and focused on the purpose or goal of reflection. Moon (1999) also notes that it is important to consider all hidden agendas and power relationships that can inhibit reflection. This is an important consideration when structuring an induction program, because teachers who are new to a district may be especially vulnerable to power and identity issues.

Moon (1999) advocates the use of four strategies when trying to design opportunities for guided reflection. First, the structure of the task is important to consider as open-ended tasks can lead to venting or less productive forms of reflection while
overly structured tasks can eliminate teacher choice. Therefore, it is important to consider setting norms for the selection of topics and the format of discussions. Second, Moon states that various reflective tasks result in different kinds of reflection, so the choice of the task must be carefully considered. Once it is chosen, those expectations should be clearly defined and modeled to make sure that everyone has a common understanding of the reflective task. Third, she notes that an organized structure can be used to guide reflection. If one is going to be used, it will need to be well thought out and discussed with the participants. Finally, she states that more support at the beginning of a task can often lead to less support at a later point.

Moon (1999) describes a case study that involved the structuring of specific opportunities for guided reflection. This study involved teaching a short course in continuing professional development for non-specialists to better promote health in their settings, and Moon used four phases to guide the reflective activity. Those phases included: 1) developing awareness of the nature of current practice, 2) clarifying the new learning and how it related to current understanding, 3) integrating the new learning and current practice, and 4) anticipating or imagining the nature of improved practice. Data indicated that although the students appreciated the reflective content of the course, the trainers sometimes let the reflective time be squeezed out of the agenda when time was short. Moon cautioned that when time limitations are present, active teaching may have a tendency to take precedence over reflective activity unless those issues are addressed in advance when setting up the course.
Reflection can also be developed through carefully designed teaching strategies including modeling of reflection and guided practice. Valli (1997) cites action research, journaling, case studies, supervision, and classroom discussion as methods that have commonly been used and indicates that the type of strategy educators use should be chosen based on the kind of reflection that they are trying to promote. She then describes five different kinds of reflection including: technical reflection, reflection-in and on-action, deliberative reflection, personalistic reflection, and critical reflection. Helping individual teachers become reflective is not enough. Schools need to develop cultures that promote reflection by providing opportunities for teachers to have their thinking “…confirmed, modified, or stimulated to new levels of understanding by reflecting aloud in groups or through shared journals…” in “…supportive communities of learning” (p. 88). Valli also states that collective undertaking with communal dialogue representing many different voices can be a source of transformation for individual teachers as well as for schools.

A teacher induction program provides a unique opportunity to explore opportunities for induction teachers to engage in collaborative groups for the purpose of fostering reflective practice. Therefore, it is important to investigate strategies that might be helpful in promoting reflection in that setting. Research has suggested that the use of journal writing can be used to foster reflective practice for pre-service and practicing teachers; therefore, it is important to examine that work to learn how it can inform this study.
Journal Writing as a Strategy to Foster Reflection

Journal writing can be a powerful learning tool (Yinger, 1985) and has often been suggested as a means to enhance reflective practice (Valli, 1997; Carter, 1998; Boud, 2001). The inherent purpose of journal writing is generally seen as a means of expressing a person’s thoughts; therefore, the process of writing can lead to greater understanding as information is processed and represented in written form. It also provides both immediate and long-term self-initiated feedback that contributes to a cyclical process of learning (Yinger, 1985). It is important to make sure that the journal writing process is explained, described and modeled for teachers so that they understand the difference between thinking about teaching and reflecting on teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Just as all thinking about teaching is not reflective thinking, not all writing about teaching is reflective writing. In addition, the writer must know the purpose of the writing and the audience, and should not be graded or evaluated based on the reflective writing (Boud, 2001).

The goals for reflective writing also need to be clearly defined in terms of promoting teacher learning and improvement of practice (Moon, 1999; Boud, 2001). One model of how that can be done is provided by Boud (2001) who views journal writing as a means of making sense of the world. In terms of learning, he describes the journal as the place where participants record events and experiences, process them to make sense of them, recognize the learning that results, and build a foundation for new experiences to stimulate new learning. According to this model, learning is “always grounded in prior experience; therefore, any new learning must take that prior experience into account”
(Boud, 2001, p. 11). Boud’s second assumption is that the learner must be actively involved in the process of “engaging with the events” that they have experienced (p. 12). Boud describes a type of reflection that involves the writer in reflection on anticipated events, reflection during events, and reflection after events. The importance of revisiting prior journal entries is also emphasized so that the learner will continue thinking about them and adding new ideas. In the present study, teachers were asked to write reflections that were based upon their own work experiences so that they could reflect on their practice in an effort to improve their teaching.

Benefits of Reflective Writing

Teacher education programs are often designed with a goal of encouraging reflective practice among pre-service teachers and can provide some insight into how structured opportunities for reflection can be built into other kinds of teacher development programs. Journal writing has commonly been used as a strategy in pre-service teacher education programs, and a variety of studies have been done to learn more about the impact of reflective writing upon the perceptions and practice of pre-service teachers. This research can be helpful in terms of understanding what has been learned from work with pre-service teachers that can be applied to work with induction teachers.

Giovannelli (2003) examined possible relationships between teacher candidates’ reflective dispositions toward teaching and the extent that they demonstrated effective instructional strategies. A teacher candidate survey designed by LaBoskey (1994, as cited in Giovannelli, 2003) was used to evaluate the teachers’ reflective disposition, as well as five open-ended essay questions, which were scored based on predetermined criteria.
Teacher effectiveness was measured through a survey completed by field supervisors. Reflective disposition was related to effective teaching, especially in the areas of instructional behavior, classroom organization, and teacher expectations. The authors concluded that teacher education programs should support the inclusion of high standards of teaching quality related to a reflective disposition toward teaching. This also has possible implications for induction programs.

A similar study examined the relationship between prospective teachers’ reflections and growth in their teaching abilities (Gipe & Richards, 1992). Prospective teachers were engaged in dialogue journal writing activities and wrote weekly entries sharing their thoughts and feelings about teaching. Their supervisors read them and responded back to them in ways that were purposefully written to encourage reflection. The prospective teachers were then independently evaluated by their classroom teachers and supervisors using predetermined criteria. The six pre-service teachers who were rated as improving the most in their teaching ability wrote the largest number of journal reflections and showed substantial professional growth. The 11 prospective teachers who were rated as the least improved in preparing and presenting appropriate lessons wrote the smallest number of reflections. Although the findings were inconclusive, the authors suggest that the results indicate possible benefits of including reflective writing within teacher preparation programs.

In another study of pre-service teachers, Uline, Wilson, and Cordry (2004) examined the use of reflective journaling by prospective teachers to write about their most significant learning from clinical experiences. Although the authors sought to
investigate what the prospective teachers were learning through their clinical experiences in teacher preparation programs, the journal writings provided an important means of identifying areas of concern for developing teachers. The researchers identified classroom management, teacher flexibility, and time management as the three most frequent concerns of the 83 teachers surveyed and suggested greater emphasis on those areas as part of teacher preparation programs. This research suggests that reflective journal writing could also be an important means of identifying teacher concerns for induction teachers and could provide useful data for planning a new teacher induction class. More research is needed in this area.

Another study focused on the feedback that was given to prospective teachers on journal reflections. Bain, Mills, Ballantyne and Packer (2002) examined journal writing of pre-service teachers to determine the importance of feedback in developing the teachers’ reflective skills. The authors sought to determine the kinds of feedback that would be most helpful to students when journal writing was used as a means to develop reflective practice. Thirty-five student teachers submitted weekly journal entries during a six-week field placement and were each assigned to one of four feedback conditions. Feedback varied in terms of whether it focused on the process of reflection or the teaching issues that were addressed in the writing and the level of questioning or challenge (a low or high level of challenge) presented in the feedback. Students were also interviewed at the end of the study regarding their participation in the project and the impact of the journal writing on their professional development. In addition, they were asked how it had impacted their understanding of and attitudes towards reflection.
Students in all conditions’ found the feedback they had received to be helpful. The most beneficial kind of feedback in developing reflective practice was that which combined a focus on the reflective writing process with questions and comments that presented new and different perspectives on the incident or issue addressed in the journal writing.

In a similar study, Spalding and Wilson (2002) focused on strategies designed to help pre-service teachers write and think more reflectively. The instructors used a portion of an essay to introduce reflection and discussed the difference between narrative and reflective writing. Valli’s (1997) description of the five types of reflection was shared. The 34 students were asked to write weekly journals and were to use all five types in their writings over the course of the summer. Students used peer sharing of their journals and received feedback from the instructors on their writing. The students were also interviewed and asked to evaluate their learning about reflection. The researchers then chose four of the students for brief case studies. As a result of the study the authors said they will no longer assume that students know how to reflect and emphasized that their evidence supported the importance of teaching students how to be reflective. All four case study students indicated that they felt they benefited from the class time spent on defining and discussing reflection, as well as viewing models of reflection. They also indicated the most important factors in their growth were the personalized feedback they received on their journal writing and the relationships with their instructors.

The study confirmed for the authors that journal writing was valuable in stimulating various types of reflection and indicated that the readings and discussion about reflection were also important. The authors revisited the four participants after their
first year of teaching and all of them shared that reflection had become an important part of their daily practice. This study supports the importance of providing personalized feedback on teachers’ interactive writing and suggests that teachers also perceive that relationships with the reader can also be an important factor in their growth.

Critical incidents were examined as a means of working with pre-service teachers to develop reflective and critical thinking skills as they wrote about their own authentic teaching experiences (Griffin, 2003). Twenty-eight pre-service teachers followed a predetermined format to write about a total of 135 critical incidents that had occurred over the course of a six-week period. At the end of the semester they also completed a self-reflection statement to share how they felt they had grown in terms of their reflective skills through the process. Nineteen of the 28 teachers perceived that the process had “improved their ability to analyze and evaluate their practice and to take multiple perspectives” (p. 217). The teachers indicated that writing the reflections had helped them to gain a greater understanding of the incident and an ability to gather more information about the problem before taking action. The author concluded that the critical incidents and related instruction increased the pre-service teachers’ ability to think critically and reflectively and saw the benefits of using this process with students to help them examine their practice. In addition, she suggested longitudinal studies to follow the teachers in their practice would be helpful. In the present study, teachers were asked to write about the challenges they faced in their practice and personalized feedback was provided on the reflections. Teachers’ perceptions were then examined to determine what benefits they felt they had gained through their participation in the process.
Reciprocal Journal Writing

Interactive and reciprocal journal writing provides another means of using reflective writing to engage teachers. Dillard (1996) examined the use of reciprocal journal writing in a university setting, where she and her students responded to each other’s writing in a reciprocal manner. Through that process she reflected on her own practice by situating herself as a learner. In effect, she was modeling the practice of reflection to help her and her students “make the connections between what we learn and our overall life experiences, particularly as teachers” (p. 14). Dillard stated that she used this reciprocal journal writing process to engage both the teacher facilitator and the learner in meaningful dialogue as a way to “reflect on our practice, personal growth and empowerment within the process of our own teaching” (p. 20). One of Dillard’s students shared that the process was important, not only as a way for teachers and students to get to know each other, but because it engaged the students in “learning how teachers should be involved in the learning process” (p. 20) by reflecting on their own practice.

Reciprocal journaling between a first-year teacher, her mentor, and her principal was examined by Tillman (2003). Data was collected from dialogic journaling and individual and group interviews. Dialogic journaling was described as the process where participants have written conversations with each other over an extended time period. The author reported that the reflection and journaling in this study were helpful in uncovering some of the concerns and expectations of the first-year teacher and the principal. The new teacher stated in an interview that the reciprocal journaling with the principal also helped her feel more confident in her teaching. In addition, the process
helped her to feel valued in the school community and contributed to her belief that the principal was committed to her success. In this study the first-year teacher placed more value on the leadership of the principal than she did on the help received from her mentor. That research suggests that a reciprocal journaling process between teachers and their principals should be examined as a tool to build relationships and promote learning for new teachers. More research needs to be done in this area.

Prior research within teacher preparation programs provides many insights into how teacher induction programs can use journal writing to foster reflection as a means of professional growth. Reflective disposition is related to teacher effectiveness (Giovannelli, 2003) and evidence suggests that pre-service teachers benefit from an increased emphasis on reflective thinking in teacher preparation programs (Gipe & Richards, 1992). This would suggest that induction teachers would also benefit from efforts to foster reflective thinking. Journal writing has been shown to be an effective tool for identifying teacher concerns (Uline et al., 2004) and fostering reflective thinking (Bain, et al., 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Journal writing about critical incidents in practice increased prospective teachers’ ability to think critically and reflectively (Griffin, 2003). Reflective journal writing has been effective in fostering growth in pre-service teachers, which suggests it can also be a meaningful learning tool for induction teachers.

Benefits of Induction Practices Focused on Reflection

There is a limited amount of current research that examines induction programs that have been purposefully structured to foster teacher reflection and learning. There are three notable examples, however, that suggest there are some benefits to providing
induction teachers with structured opportunities for reflection. These studies can contribute to our knowledge about how induction programs can be structured to provide focused opportunities for reflection.

McCormick (2001) studied beginning teachers in California as they participated in a two-year formative assessment experience (CFASST). The purpose of the study was to determine how the beginning teachers perceived their own development as reflective practitioners. Participants were involved in a variety of activities that included peer observation and coaching, professional seminars and workshops, and specific guided reflection activities. Analysis of the data suggested that the beginning teachers in the program regularly reflected on their practice and used a variety of different formats such as written, verbal, small group, individual and one-to-one settings as part of that process. In addition, the data suggested that the nature of that reflection, as well as its extent, changed over the course of the study. All CFASST events involved required structured reflection, which was criticized by many participants at the start of the program. Most participants later acknowledged that it had contributed to an increased ability to reflect on their teaching and that it had been beneficial for them and for their students.

In a much smaller scale study, beginning teachers in a suburban school district chose to talk with other teachers about challenges in their teaching practice (Cady, 1998). Ten Reflective Practice Groups were created that each included the new teachers, their mentors, a district administrator and a college faculty person. These groups met once a month for eight months to reflect on classroom and instruction issues. During meetings, participants each shared a difficult situation involving students in their classrooms. The
group then followed a ten-step process to discuss some of the issues. Notes were taken for each of the meetings, which the authors indicated resulted in over three hundred mini-case studies.

At the end of the year, the mini-case studies were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative procedures. Cady (1998) noted that all groups embraced the reflective process and enjoyed talking to other teachers about the challenges they faced. The process led to informal action research as the teachers collected and analyzed classroom data and shared their findings. The participants indicated that the groups had helped them to better meet their students’ needs. Reflective Practice Groups provided a positive framework for teachers to reflect on their professional practice and the author suggests that the use of these groups may be a way to increase teacher effectiveness, as well as professional satisfaction.

In a less structured setting in an urban district, a high school administrator invited new teachers to meet with him voluntarily after school to form a learning community (Carver, 2004). While this was not a structured induction program, and was not mandatory for teachers, there was a high level of participation in the group. The group met every two weeks and served as a support group for new teachers in a challenging urban setting. Participants reported that the group provided a place where new teachers could problem-solve and not feel alone in facing the challenges of their practice. The group served as a means of encouragement to the teachers while helping them to focus on classroom instructional issues and good teaching. It offered, “…a clear mission focused on good teaching, a safe space in which to reflect, and a team approach where everyone
was committed to one another’s success” (p. 59). The agenda and substance for the meetings was determined by the needs of the teachers in the group, and the author reports that by solving the problems of their own practice the teachers were able to take responsibility for their own learning.

In all three of these studies, teachers perceived that they benefited from their participation in induction programs that were designed to include structured opportunities for reflection. Those studies involved the participants in written, verbal, individual, and small group settings to reflect on the challenges they faced in their practice. The present study examined induction teachers’ perceptions about their involvement in structured activities focused on reflection. Teachers in this study were engaged in written and verbal reflection within individual and small group settings.

Benefits of Professional Development Programs Focused on Reflection

Although the research in this area is limited, professional development programs for experienced teachers have also been structured to include a focus on guided reflection. Glazer et al (2004) examined a program in which five experienced elementary teachers met to explore a process of collaborative reflection as a form of professional development. Those teachers, along with the three researchers, met regularly to plan and implement their process for collaborative reflection. The structure for the meetings and procedures to be followed were determined in advance. Group members proposed the topics for discussion based on their own classroom issues and worked collaboratively toward solutions to problems of their practice. Meeting time was set aside for professional reflection and for reflection on the process. The last meeting was solely
devoted to discussion of the process, and teachers completed an open-ended questionnaire about their participation in the group. Teacher participants indicated multiple rewards from their participation, which included knowledge they gained, and a deeper understanding about themselves, both personally and professionally. Participants also indicated that the process of collaborative reflection was valuable and stated that they believed it would be beneficial to all teachers.

In another professional development program, novice teachers with less than two years of experience met as a learning community for the purpose of learning about teaching and learning. Meyer (2002) examined the learning community in an effort to describe and assess the participants’ experiences. The size of the group fluctuated between six and fourteen participants who taught various subjects and grade levels in different schools. All but one of the teachers were graduates of Stanford University’s teacher education program (STEP) and had completed the requirements for their combined masters and credentials program. Data were collected from observations, interviews, and documents. The author also attended each of the 50 STEP meetings. Each of the meetings included two routines, a “check-in” (Meyer, 2002, p. 34) conversational time where participants shared personal and professional information, and a “charette” (p. 35), which was a 60-80 minute formal inquiry-based process. During this time one participant would share a classroom artifact and then the group followed a prescriptive routine to provide feedback and conduct follow-up discussion.

The group meetings continued for several years. Data indicated that some of the conditions that positively impacted the longevity of the group included: a) the established
conversation routines for the group; b) the group’s collective authority to determine the
direction of the group, including the frequency of the meetings, and the schedule for the
participants’ sharing of their work; and c) the separation from their districts that provided
them a safe space to talk about their teaching. The group shared that they had developed
friendships through the process, and although they noted some difficulties, all
participants viewed the process favorably. Results suggest that novice teachers benefit
from the opportunity to participate in a learning community where reflective dialogue is
focused on student learning. Although this learning community did not take place in a
school setting, school leaders can learn from this example how to support teachers by
creating opportunities for reflective dialogue and conversation about improving teaching
and learning.

Creating a Safe Space for Teacher Reflection

For teachers to be willing to engage in meaningful collegial reflection upon their
practice, they must first feel confident that they have a safe space where they can share
their concerns with others as they problem-solve the challenges they face in their practice
(Carver, 2004). Trust is a key ingredient for teachers to be able to engage in meaningful
conversations about the problems they are experiencing in their classrooms because they
need to be confident that they can share both their successes and their failures. Whether
those reflections are being shared with an administrator or with other teachers, trusting
relationships must be established before those conversations can occur.
Relationships Built Upon Trust

Trust is “a work group’s generalized expectancy that the words, actions, and promises of another individual or group can be relied upon (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985, p. 2). Trust is an important component of the relationships that teachers form with their colleagues and their principals, for when they trust those they work with, they can better collaborate to meet the challenges of their practice. Educational leaders that have the trust of their teachers and their communities are also more likely to be successful in creating productive learning environments (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Faculty trust was examined by Hoy and Kupersmith (1985), who sought to investigate its relationship to the principal, colleagues, and the school organization. The study included 944 teachers in 46 New Jersey elementary schools who took the Trust Scales questionnaire. Data were compiled for each school and strong support was found for the relationship between perceived principal authenticity and aspects of trust. Principals who were willing to admit their own mistakes, who did not manipulate teachers, and who behaved as “real people” (p. 9) generated trust among teachers. Openness and candor promoted trust and confidence in the principal’s leadership. The authenticity of the principal was also related to faculty trust in the organization, but was not significantly related to trust in colleagues. These results suggest teachers are able to establish trusting relationships with educational leaders when those leaders exhibit the characteristics of openness, candor, and authenticity.

The relationship between faculty trust and climate was examined by Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, & Hoy (1994). Data were collected from 2777 teachers at 87 middle schools
in New Jersey. The organizational climate of the schools was examined through three dimensions of principal behavior including supportive, directive, and restrictive behavior, and three dimensions of teacher behavior including collegial, committed, and disengaged behavior. Openness in interpersonal relationships promotes trust among teachers and interpersonal trust appeared to foster openness in the organization’s relationships. Middle schools where principals were open with teachers tended to have teachers who were open with each other. Additionally, in schools where teachers trusted the principal they also tended to trust each other. Faculty trust in the principal was also strongly related to principal openness and supportive principal behavior. The authors concluded that openness in interpersonal relationships promotes trust and interpersonal trust fosters openness in organizational relationships.

Climate is also related to organizational health, which is described as the interpersonal relationships between students, teachers, and administrators that make up the climate of the school. Hoy, Sabo, and Barnes (1996) studied faculty trust and examined characteristics of middle schools’ organizational health that fostered faculty trust. 2,741 teachers from 86 middle schools were participants. Teachers were divided into random groups. One group completed the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI-RM) that measures six aspects of school climate, and the other completed two trust scales that were each composed of seven items on a Likert-type scale. The overall organizational health of the middle school was significantly related to faculty trust in the principal and was moderately related to faculty trust in their colleagues. In general, greater degrees of faculty trust were related to greater degrees of organizational health.
The role of the principal was described as “critical” in shaping the culture of the school and trust in the principal was “first and foremost an outgrowth of positive principal action in the form of collegial leadership” (p. 34). Collegial leadership can therefore be seen as important in shaping the culture of an educational organization and in generating trust in its leadership.

Trust has also been studied to examine how it relates to middle school effectiveness (Tarter, Sabo, & Hoy, 1995). Data were collected from 2777 teachers from 87 middle schools to examine how principal behavior relates to school effectiveness. Supportive leadership and faculty collegiality were measured using subsets of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ-RM), a revised form of Halpin and Croft’s OCDQ (1963, as cited in Tarter, Sabo, Hoy, 1995). Faculty trust in the principal and faculty trust in colleagues were measured using scales developed by Hoy and Kupersmith (1985). In each school a random sample of the faculty responded to the instruments that measured principal and teacher behavior, and another random sample responded to the trust scales. Both faculty trust of the principal and faculty trust in teacher colleagues were related to school effectiveness. The more supportive the leadership, the more trust in the relationships among colleagues and the greater the perception of the organization’s effectiveness.

Relational trust, or trust which is found within the relationships of the organization’s members, can be an important factor that can influence the work of the learning community. In a longitudinal study of 400 Chicago teachers, relational trust was found to have a central role in building effective education communities (Bryk &
The authors suggest that relational trust is organized around four areas: respect, personal regard, personal integrity, and competence in core role responsibilities. When these factors are present, the many social exchanges that take place in an organization’s daily life form social patterns that can have a positive effect. When school professionals trust each other they are more willing to experiment with new practices because they feel they are in a safe environment. Relational trust also fosters social exchanges as teachers and administrators learn from each other. Without trust, the kind of social interactions where professionals discuss what is or isn’t working are not as likely to occur.

Educational leaders play a central role in developing relational trust as they model it in their interactions with staff, students, and parents. Therefore, for an educational leader to be effective he or she must develop strong relationships with teachers, students, parents and the community. Those relationships need to be based on trust (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985) and to be characterized by openness (Hoffman et al., 1994) to help create a positive school climate, a healthy organization (Hoy et al., 1996) and a strong foundation for the school community. Trust in schools cannot be taken for granted and must be cultivated and sustained (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Faculty trust for the principal or educational leader is important in creating a culture where teachers are comfortable trying new and innovative practices and are not fearful of negative repercussions if some of those efforts aren’t successful. Strong relationships allow for collective and collaborative decision-making, which makes change and reform possible (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Strong relationships, built upon trust, make it more possible for reform
initiatives to take hold with teacher buy-in and “diffuse broadly across the school because trust reduces the sense of risk associated with change” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 42). Trusting relationships will need to be an important component of the present study so that the induction teachers will feel they have a safe space where they can reflect upon the problems of their practice.

Effective school leaders have strong relationships with all of the school’s stakeholders (Tarter et al., 1995). They are honest with others and are good listeners; they are genuinely interested in cultivating relationships with students, staff, parents, and the community. Openness is also important (Miller & Hoy, 2000), and an effective leader fosters an environment that allows and encourages others to bring their problems forward when they are small. Effective leaders extend themselves beyond what is typical and make themselves available to others to help solve problems, big or small. They have personal integrity and can be counted on to keep their word. In addition, they foster an environment that encourages learning and the implementation of new ideas. Strong, trusting relationships are critical to the work of an educational leader in creating a positive climate, which also has a positive impact on student achievement (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). As Tschannen-Moran (2004) says, “Trustworthy leadership is the heart of productive schools” (p. 13). The present study will examine the teachers’ perceptions about the climate of the class and whether they believe that they have established enough relational trust with the facilitators and their colleagues to be able to safely reflect on their practice.
Engaging Teachers in Meaningful Work

Teachers need to be lifelong learners and change agents (Fullan, 1993) who continue to learn throughout their career as they work to improve their practice. In order for teachers to be engaged in the improvement of teaching and learning, they must find the work to be meaningful and relevant to who they are and what they do (Smylie, 1995). Therefore, teachers must not be “the passive recipients of someone else’s knowledge” (Miller, 1992), but must instead be involved in professional learning that is focused on the practices of teaching and learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999) so they can see the connections between their learning and their everyday work (Smylie, 1995). When teachers are provided with an opportunity to solve their own problems in a supportive setting they can become responsible for their own learning and become empowered as professionals (Carver, 2004).

Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment has been defined as the process whereby teachers are given “more power to shape the decisions affecting their work and their profession” (Whitaker & Moses, 1990). In recent years, teacher empowerment has been seen as the cornerstone of many educational reform efforts (Klecker, & Loadman, 1998), and has been found to benefit teachers through increased professional growth, self-efficacy, autonomy (Short, 1994), and a sense of ownership, while encouraging professional collaboration among colleagues (Whitaker & Moses, 1990). Teacher empowerment also contributes to the development of personal competence while providing the teacher with opportunities to demonstrate that competence (Short, 1998).
A recent research study involving 86 New Jersey middle schools and 2,741 teachers examined the relationship between school climate and teacher empowerment and also explored the relationship between teacher empowerment and school effectiveness (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Data regarding school climate, teacher empowerment and effectiveness were collected through three teacher survey instruments and student achievement data. Results indicated that the schools were conducive to teacher empowerment when the principal’s leadership was collegial, when teachers demonstrated a high level of professionalism, and when there was a strong “internal academic press” (p. 720). Teacher empowerment was also related to higher levels of effectiveness, as perceived by teachers. In addition, teacher empowerment was related to higher levels of student achievement in reading and math, as measured by standardized state testing.

Another study compared the leadership decision-making patterns of principals and organizational structures of 18 effective middle schools with those of 18 ineffective middle schools in Texas (Johnson, 1992). The author sought to determine characteristics of principal and teacher leadership associated with successful middle schools. Effective middle schools were defined to be those in which the students were scoring above the state average on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test. Data were collected through surveys, phone interviews, and on-site visits. High-performing schools were found to have significantly more teacher input into instruction-related issues than lower-performing schools. The author stated that school systems “largely fail to capitalize on the strengths and expertise of their own work force” (Johnson, 1992, p. 57). Higher performing schools had more collaboration among
teachers and administrators and also allowed significantly more teacher input into classroom, curriculum and instructional decisions.

Short (1994) examined four “empowered” (p.493) schools with self-managing teams to study the role of the principal in the development of those groups. Empowerment was defined as the process by which teachers develop the ability to take charge of their own growth and solve their own problems. Two of the schools were suburban schools and two were urban schools. Data were collected through observations, interviews and document analysis. Four themes were identified from the data regarding the role of the principal in facilitating the self-managing teams in the study. First, one important behavior of the principal was to help the teams engage in reflection while challenging them to work through their own solutions to problems. A second involved the principal’s involvement in focusing the team on goals. A third key behavior noted was the principal’s role in encouraging the team to be critical of their performance, especially if expected progress was lacking. Finally, the principals helped the teams acknowledge their own successes. In all four settings, the principal played a critical role in the development of their self-managed teams, which suggests that these four leadership themes could be helpful to others interested in teacher empowerment.

Educational leaders need to develop leadership capacity among teachers so that they can have a voice in shaping their learning as they work toward improving their practice. As Lambert (2002) says, “Instructional leadership must be a shared, community undertaking. Leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school” (p. 37). Teachers can share their influence through shared decision-making and increased
involvement in leadership activities (Pink & Hyde, 1992). In order to make the work of teaching relevant to the lives of teachers, they need to be provided with opportunities for collegial work with their peers and empowered to be actively involved in making instructional decisions that affect themselves and their work with students.

Teacher empowerment provides a powerful means of engaging teachers in meaningful work toward continuous improvement. Teachers believe they are more empowered when their work allows them to learn continuously, to grow professionally, and to expand their own skills through their work in the school (Short, 1998). In addition, teachers feel more empowered when they have greater opportunities to be involved in decision-making on issues that are of concern to them, and that have a genuine impact and influence on school life.

Short (1998) suggests that educational leaders cannot empower teachers directly; they must, instead, create environments and provide opportunities that lead to and support teacher empowerment. Additionally, leaders in these roles must have the trust and credibility of their staff and see their role as one of fostering the expertise of the teachers. Teacher empowerment makes the work of teaching more relevant by helping increase teachers’ ownership in their work (Whitaker & Moses, 1990). In addition it creates higher teacher autonomy and self-efficacy and provides a means for professional growth (Short, 1994). In this study, the goal was to create a learning community environment that provided opportunities that supported teacher empowerment as induction teachers engaged in solving the problems of their practice.
Creating a Professional Learning Community

A professional learning community is based upon the assumption that the mission of schools is not only to ensure that students are taught, but also to ensure that students learn (DuFour, 2004). A professional learning community, additionally, is one where everyone, including the teachers and administrators, is focused on learning and members work together collaboratively to help each other learn. This goes beyond occasional scheduled professional development sessions and includes regular in-depth conversations among staff about how to improve teaching and learning. As Regie Routman (2002) says, “Even the best professional development may fail to create meaningful and lasting changes in teaching and learning--unless teachers engage in ongoing professional dialogue to develop a reflective school community” (p. 32). This is ongoing conversation that is meant to initiate and sustain change, and it must be embedded in practice. Routman suggests that for educators to impact student learning and achievement, there needs to be “ongoing professional reading, reflection, sharing, thinking, collaboration, practice, revision, and continual discussion about all aspects of teaching, learning, and evaluating” (p. 33). This kind of focused, professional discussion needs to be central to the work of the learning community.

The foundation for a learning community is built upon four “building blocks” (DuFour, 1998) that include: the mission, the vision, the values, and the goals for the community. The mission of the learning community asks the group to define their fundamental purpose by answering the question, “Why do we exist?” (p. 58). The vision gives the organization a sense of direction by answering the question, “What do we hope
to become? (p. 62). The third building block, values, involves the group in developing an understanding of how they intend to fulfill their vision by answering the question, “How must we behave in order to make our shared vision a reality?” (p. 88). The fourth building block, goals, requires the group to set priorities by answering the question, “Which steps will we take first, and when?” (p. 100).

Sometimes school leaders attempt to create learning communities without following through to develop the four building blocks that form its foundation. For a learning community to exist, the teachers and principal must all see themselves as learners that share a common purpose and mission: the common goal of working together to improve teaching and student learning. Relationships are the cornerstone of the community (Shields, 2004) and the principal or educational leaders’ relationship with the teachers is critical in terms of how they will work together to shape the mission, vision, values, and goals for the learning community. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state, “The school that operates as a professional learning community recognizes that its members must engage in the ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement (p. xii). For that to happen, educational leaders must provide an appropriate setting where that kind of learning can take place. DuFour and Eaker suggest that, “Educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (p. xii).

DuFour (2004) states that there are three core principles of professional learning communities. The first core principle is that the mission of the school is to ensure that
students learn. In most schools, educators make curriculum decisions about what the students need to learn and be able to do, and they also make decisions about the assessments they will use to provide evidence of that learning. A professional learning community goes beyond decisions about curriculum and assessment to consider the answer to the following question: “How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty learning?” (p. 8). At the end of a unit, if a student does not master the material, teachers typically struggle with how to address that issue. Sometimes they even determine that in their need to move on or cover the material, they cannot address the issue. In a professional learning community, however, teachers and principals make a commitment to collaboratively address those issues.

A professional learning community involves a different perception of student success. Using this philosophy, no student failure is acceptable; therefore, teachers must collaboratively look for how they can help students learn. This sometimes involves systemic and school-wide initiatives to provide extra intervention on a collective level. It also involves collaborative discussion among teaching teams to explore new ways to meet students’ needs. A professional learning community makes a genuine commitment to ensure that all students can learn.

The second core principle of a professional learning community is that it requires a “culture of collaboration” (DuFour, 2004, p. 9). This is a culture where teachers recognize that they must work collectively as well as individually to achieve their common purpose of ensuring learning for all students. To do so, collaboration to improve student learning is not something that happens occasionally but is instead embedded in
the fabric of teachers’ work. It does not happen by chance but is instead part of a systemic process in which teachers work together with a common goal of analyzing and improving their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams and engage in an ongoing cycle of asking reflective questions that promote deeper understanding about how students learn so that they can make changes to their instruction to improve student achievement.

The third core principle about professional learning communities is that they have a “focus on results” (DuFour, 2004, p. 10). A professional learning community’s effectiveness is measured in terms of the results. Each team must use ongoing assessment to determine student learning and achievement, set goals for improvement, and then collect evidence to measure progress toward the goal. Professional learning communities use data to determine what goals they need to set, they collaborate to determine how to best meet those goals, and they continually monitor progress toward those goals. Goals are redefined as needed, as part of a continual process of reflection and dialogue in the community.

In order to better understand the concept of a professional learning community Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) examined the work of principals and teachers in six middle schools in different school districts. Three schools were in urban areas and three were in suburban settings. The study focused on determining the impact of the principal in creating a professional learning community and the impact of the learning community on student learning. Learning Organization Practice Profile surveys were administered to
all teacher participants, and other data sources included interviews with the principals and focus groups with the teachers.

All principals shared reasons why they believed their school was a learning community and teachers in the focus groups agreed. Teachers emphasized the importance of strong leadership that is focused on professional development. They also stressed the need for professional development to be embedded in the job and developed in conjunction with the staff. All six principals cited several characteristics as being important to the learning community. Those included: a shared vision, team learning, data informed decision-making, trusting relationships, and trust. These characteristics were also important considerations when planning for the teacher induction class in the present study.

All teachers can benefit from the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers and engage in reflective dialogue about the practice of teaching and the nature of student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Therefore, in order to build professional learning communities, “meaningful collaboration must be systematically embedded” into the teachers’ work. Shifting the focus of those discussions from a focus on teaching to one that emphasizes student learning can lead to significant learning for teachers.

For school settings to be transformed into professional learning communities, a reculturing needs to occur, and strong leadership will be needed to facilitate the change. Teachers have often taught in isolation (Wong et al, 2005), so it can be a challenging transition when teachers begin the process to collaboratively analyze their teaching and student learning, in order to make the necessary changes to their instruction practices.
Many traditional professional development activities have been somewhat removed from actual classroom practice, and the critical context within which teachers teach.

Lieberman (1995) emphasizes that it is important for schools to discover “the power of professional development when it is viewed as an integral part of the life of the school” (p. 592). There is a growing consensus that supports the need to provide professional development for teachers that is embedded in their practice (Clark & Clark, 2004; Langer & Colton, 2005), which is needed to support the learning of teachers in a professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Even so, strong leadership is also needed to help foster the professional dialogue that is necessary for a staff to make this transition. Educational leaders must work collaboratively with teachers to guide them through the process and provide the professional development that is needed to help shape the mission, the vision, the values, and the goals for the professional learning community. As Joyce (2004) says, “Many teachers need to experience cooperative professional inquiry before they commit to it” (p. 82). Teachers need to be taught how to do collaborative inquiry in reflective group settings as they work to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Professional development must be site-based and ongoing, and must be embedded in the teachers’ practice. The induction class in this study represents an effort to create one such professional learning community.

Summary

Research on induction teachers has shown that these teachers are entering a new phase of their learning and need more than just social support. Induction teachers want to
learn how to be good teachers. Therefore, induction programs need to be seen as valuable opportunities for professional development, and need to have teacher learning as their goal. By using what we have learned about professional development, induction programs can be designed to provide structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice in an effort to improve it. As teachers engage in reflective writing and collaborative reflection groups, they can work within a supportive learning community environment to problem-solve the challenges they face in their practice. Within that setting that must establish trusting relationships with their leaders and their colleagues to feel they have a safe space in which to talk about their work. In addition, they need to be provided with a supportive environment that empowers them to have a voice in planning the work of the learning community. Using the literature reviewed in this chapter, the current study seeks to examine and describe the experiences of teachers as they begin their work in a new district and participate in the learning community of the teacher induction class.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study uses qualitative methods to examine and describe the experiences of teachers as they begin their work in a new district and participate in the learning community (Wenger, 1998; DuFour & Eaker, 1998) of the district’s teacher induction class. A qualitative research design allows for the study of participants in their natural settings in an effort to better understand and interpret the meaning people bring to their own lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative methods are also well suited to questions regarding the quality of programs and can be used to better understand, in the participants’ own terms, what impact their experiences within the program have had on them, both personally and professionally (Janesick, 2003). This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of the induction class participants to discover what common themes and patterns may emerge from the data. The ultimate goal of this study is to see what can be learned from the teachers’ experiences and participation in the induction program, to see what impact it had on their personal and professional lives, and to see what recommendations could be made for future improvement of the program.

A qualitative approach allows for the use of a variety of interpretive methods to provide many different perspectives. Janesick (2003) uses the concept of crystallization
to describe the many different facets of any given approach or social setting. In this instance, the understanding of the teachers’ experience will always be partial and situated; however, as different methods are employed, they each illuminate a different facet that contributes to a more greater depth of understanding. A qualitative design also has “an elastic quality…,” which means it can be “…adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study proceeds” (Janesick, 2003, p. 73). This kind of approach allows for the discovery of emerging themes and patterns, and provides the opportunity to use what is learned from the data to further guide and shape the study. The categories are not imposed upon the data but emerge from it, which means that subsequent decisions about procedures and analysis are made as themes emerge in the data. As Janesick (2003) states, designing qualitative research is in itself an “…act of interpretation from beginning to end” (p. 73).

Context of the Study

The goals for this teacher induction program were established in discussions with the four lead mentors and the personnel director based upon my prior work with the last two years’ teacher induction classes. They were also shaped by my desire for this induction class to serve as a form of professional development for the teachers. While the class facilitators had considered the induction program a tool for the teachers’ professional growth, feedback from the teachers during the previous two years had indicated that the teachers still believed that their first year had been more about surviving day-to-day and less about their overall professional growth as a teacher. Based on what was from the pilot study, several changes were made. The 2005-2006 induction
class was designed to incorporate various elements that would provide the teachers with a focus on reflection (Schon, 1983; Moon, 1999; Valli, 1997), as well as the opportunity to engage in reflection through interactive and reflective journal writing (Carter, 1998; Boud, 2001; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Dillard, 1996), class discussions, and small discussion groups (Cady, 1998; Glazer et al., 2004; Carver, 2004). By including these as class components, my goal as a class facilitator and researcher was to work collaboratively with the teachers within a class setting that was designed to operate as a learning community (Wenger, 1998; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

From a sociocultural perspective, Wenger (1998) describes a learning community as a community of practice that is focused on learning. He further defines a community of practice as having three components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. In keeping with this concept of a learning community, the class was structured to be a collaborative effort, where the teachers and I, as one of the class facilitators, were engaged in interactive writing and discussion that was used to shape the course. An emergent design was utilized for the course, which was based on the participants’ feedback and input to the development of the program. Teachers contributed their ideas, in writing and through discussion, to shape the monthly class agenda by sharing their suggestions for class discussion topics and their preferences for class format. Interactive journal writing and responses as well as large and small group discussions were chosen as class components to provide the participants with regular opportunities to provide feedback and offer suggestions for how we could better structure the class to meet their needs.
Although prior research was used to develop the goals and initial structure of the induction program a priori, I attempted to learn from the teachers’ experience in the program while trying not to impose my own beliefs on what those experiences would be. My goal was to be open to any themes or patterns that might emerge and to employ an analysis that was grounded in that data to better understand the experiences of the teachers as they participated in the induction program. Knowing that all data and analysis would be filtered through my own lens, I attempted to gather data within different settings and contexts. This variety ensured a system of checks and balances while providing sources of disconfirming evidence leading to new insights.

A second purpose for different sources was to allow for triangulation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers’ experiences in the program. Qualitative research methods also provided me with the flexibility to follow the data and move in a different direction as warranted. Using constant comparative analysis (Patton, 2002) the data were analyzed within and across data sources over the course of the year to help me make decisions regarding the planning for the course and the direction of the study. Ultimately, I had two goals. One was to use the emergent data to help shape the course. The second goal was to learn from these teachers’ experiences to improve the program and make it more helpful to the district’s future induction teachers.

Setting

This study took place in a suburban school district in a middle-to-upper class community outside a Midwestern city. The district is in a growing community that has
experienced significant expansion in student population at all grade levels over the last several years. As of the start of the study, in August 2005, the district’s total enrollment was 3,430 students, which had more than doubled since 1997. The district has 281 teachers of which 208 hold a master’s degree or higher. For the last several years, the district has been growing at a rate of approximately 18 percent annually, and as a result, the size of the teaching staff has increased proportionately each year. For example, the middle school has grown from a population of approximately 525 students during the 2001-2002 school year to approximately 830 students during the 2005-2006 school year. Between eight and 16 new middle school staff members have been hired for each of those four years in that building alone, with 13 being hired for the 2005-2006 school year. The district total for that time period was 40 new staff members.

All newly hired teachers in this suburban school district are assigned a mentor and are required to participate in the district-sponsored teacher induction program. New teachers also attend a two-day orientation and the new teacher induction class as part of their employment. Participants are required to attend seven class sessions and complete all course requirements, which include writing five reflections and responding to at least three of the facilitator’s reflective writing papers. Teachers in the induction class receive a stipend of $100.00 for their participation. In addition, any teachers who desire to receive graduate credit for the class are also required to write a final paper and give a final presentation during one of the last two class sessions.
Participants

Forty teachers were hired for the 2005-2006 school year in this suburban school district and participated in the teacher induction program. Participants included all new licensed staff members who were employed for the district to teach or work in all four of the district’s buildings. Ten of the participants worked in the K-1 building, seven were from the 2-5 intermediate building, 13 were middle school teachers working with students in grades 6-8, and 10 were high school staff members. This group of teachers included a combination of first year teachers, early practice teachers with less than five years of experience, and a small number of experienced veterans. Within this group were teachers from self-contained or departmentalized classrooms in grades K-5, as well as middle school and high school teachers that represented a variety of content areas including mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, special education, wellness, art, and instrumental music. The group also included two permanent substitutes who taught daily in elementary settings but did not have their own classroom, and four licensed specialists who do not work in classroom settings, including one school psychologist, one speech pathologist, and two special education coordinators. Four staff members were hired to work in more than one building, however those teachers were grouped according to the primary assignment where they spent most of their time.

The original teacher induction group included 38 new staff members, and all of them participated in the August orientation. Two additional teachers were hired during the first semester and joined the class, putting the total number of class participants at 40. After the school year started two experienced teachers in the group did not attend the
class. Both of those teachers had more than ten years of previous experience in other districts and had additional responsibilities to coordinate programs (special education and ESL). In September the personnel director made a district level decision to allow those staff members to choose not participate in the class due to other demands on their time. One first year teacher decided mid-year that she did not want to continue in her position and resigned. Due to their limited participation, these three teachers were excluded from the study. Thirty-seven staff members were participants in this study (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Assignment</th>
<th>Classroom Teachers*</th>
<th>Special Area Teachers**</th>
<th>Non-Teaching Staff***</th>
<th>Permanent Substitutes</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-1 Elementary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 Elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 Middle School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Induction Class Participants by Building

Note: Shared Staff are listed for the building where they spent most of their time

*Classroom Teachers include those who teach content area subjects

**Special Area Teachers include those who teach art, music, or wellness

***Non-Teaching staff include school psychologists, speech pathologists, and special education coordinators
The 37 remaining staff members (see Appendix A) all volunteered to participate in the study and completed all course requirements (see Appendix B). Eight of them worked in the K-1 building, seven worked in the 2-5 building, and one additional staff member had responsibilities in both buildings. Of the remaining participants, 10 teachers worked solely in the middle school, six staff members worked exclusively at the high school, and four staff members had responsibilities in both buildings. A total of 16 participants worked in elementary settings, and 21 staff members worked at secondary settings in the middle school and high school buildings.

All thirty-seven teachers gave their consent to participate in the study and from that group eight teachers were selected for participation in one or two audio taped interviews. Those interviewed included two teachers from the K-1 building, one teacher from the 2-5 building, four teachers from the middle school building, and one teacher from the high school. Seven of the interview participants were first or second year teachers and the eighth was a veteran teacher with four prior years of teaching experience.

Consent Procedures

Participants received a letter of introduction at the October class meeting (see Appendix C). I explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and answered questions. Teachers were then given the opportunity to provide several levels of consent (see Appendix D) depending upon their comfort level: (1) the inclusion of data from their background information form, reflective journal writing, responses, final evaluation, and final project (if applicable), (2) the inclusion of data resulting from their participation in audio-taped large-group and/or small-group discussions, and field notes,
(3) their participation in up to two 30-45 minute individual and/or small group interviews.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative affects.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research recognizes the role of the researcher as the lens through which decisions are made on what data are collected and how it is interpreted. Janesick (2003) states, “The role of the qualitative researcher, like that of the dancer or the choreographer, demands a presence, an attention to detail, and a powerful use of the researcher’s own mind and body in analysis and interpretation of the data” (p. 63). This metaphor captures my role as a researcher in this study, as my presence was felt in all decisions that were made throughout this study. I was not, in any way, an objective observer, but was instead a participant, an observer, and a co-facilitator of the course. I was involved in work with the two previous years’ classes and used what I learned from those experiences to help me shape the current course. I worked with the lead mentors to facilitate the class and had an important role in making decisions about this course. Feedback received from participants throughout the course of the year was utilized to make decisions that ultimately shaped the course.

All data that have been collected have been filtered through my own value and belief system. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state, “There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed” (p. 31). My goal in this study is not traditional scientific objectivity, but is instead the objectivity that Harding (1993) advocates when she says, “A stronger, more
adequate notion of objectivity would require methods for systematically examining all of the social values shaping a particular research process” (p. 18). That includes examining the social context, and the researcher, as well as the researched.

My role in this study is multifaceted and complex, because I am not only a class co-facilitator; I am also a building principal and district administrator. Therefore, I recognize that the participants likely see me in a position of authority, which will have an impact on how they view the study and my participation in it. The multiple roles I serve in this study and my position in my building and my district clearly have an impact on this group of new teachers. Knowing that I am in an administrative position may affect their willingness to be involved in some parts of the study or their willingness to openly share their thoughts or concerns about their practice within the context of the writings or the interviews.

Analyzing and reporting findings for the purpose of research involves “the process of interpretation, based on social constructions and the writer’s preconceived assumptions about what it means to do research” (Green & Stinson, 1999, p. 95). My role as the researcher and the values I bring to the research are therefore reflected in all interpretation of the data because of my involvement in the study as a researcher and a participant. I helped to plan the course, served as a co-facilitator, and was directly involved in an interactive journal writing process with all teacher participants. I monitored attendance, collected work, led class discussions, and examined all teacher responses for the purpose of shaping the class to meet the participants’ needs. As a researcher I was involved in observing, studying, and interpreting all data.
Insider/Outsider Status

As a building principal I am an “insider” to the school community but may be seen as more of an “outsider” to the teachers as they consider what they are comfortable sharing with me concerning the problems they are experiencing in their practice. As I have developed relationships with the teachers through dialogue and writing, I have had to be sensitive to that and diligent in making sure that I always assessed the impact my role had on the participants and the data I collected. In light of this, I also had to consider the fact that the teachers might have, either consciously or unconsciously, written or talked about things that they thought I wanted to hear. For those reasons, the grounded survey served as an important instrument to provide a system of checks and balances and a safe space for teachers to share their feelings. My reflexive journal also became extremely important as I struggled to continually recognize my place in this study and assess how my insider/outsider role was affecting my data collection and interpretation.

As a co-facilitator of this class, I was considered somewhat of an insider to the lead mentors, but I was also somewhat of an outsider as well. The lead mentors are teachers who are responsible for planning this course. While they have typically worked collaboratively with the personnel director to plan for the class, the lead mentors are ultimately responsible for the course agenda. As a co-facilitator, my insider status allowed me to have input to that process, but as an administrator and an outsider, I did not have total control of the class agenda. The personnel director and lead mentors for the district had agenda items they felt were important to include in the monthly meetings. They had the final decision-making authority to adjust the agenda, which implied an
outsider positioning as well. Therefore, although my co-facilitators, the lead mentors, shared support for this work and my study, their preferences and beliefs regarding the class agenda also had an important impact on the study.

Throughout the class, and over the course of the year, I have attempted to consider my political position within this group and coordinate my work with the other facilitators. Since the class was designed to be planned by the lead mentors, it was important that I not take over the class or allow my agenda to take the place of theirs. Therefore, I needed to carefully balance my role as an insider and co-facilitator with my outsider role as a guest by allowing the lead mentors to approve all final decisions on how the course should be constructed.

*Ethics and Politics*

There are several issues of ethics and politics that are important to my study. As a district administrator and the supervisor and evaluator of 13 of the study’s participants, I have had to be very careful to communicate clearly that participation in the study was totally voluntary, and that all information shared in writing or discussion would be strictly confidential. Participants were given an opportunity to choose pseudonyms so that their names would not be used in the study, and no information from the study was shared with other administrators or used in any way for the purposes of evaluation.

As an administrator, it was also important to me that no participant felt pressured to reveal information that they were not comfortable sharing with others. In an effort to address that issue, the class was structured so that the teachers had choices about what they could write about or talk about in their discussion groups. In addition, the teachers
were asked to share their writing with another class participant whom they chose and with whom they felt comfortable. In my role as a class facilitator I have been careful to recognize and respect the teachers’ choices and have tried not to pressure them about any of the decisions they make.

The fact that I am implementing this study in an effort to better support our district’s new teachers is also a source of bias. All of my data will be viewed through the lens of my own values and educational philosophy. My biases regarding what constitutes effective reflective practice, effective professional development, and quality induction programs also impact this study. In addition, the impact of my presence is interwoven through all elements of my research design, including my choice of using interactive reflective journal writing and responses, class discussion, small group discussions, and selected text readings as tools to help teachers mediate their learning in their new school environment.

As a co-facilitator of the new teacher class, it is important that I regularly reflect on how my presence is impacting the research setting (Roberts & McGinty, 1995), both in the decisions I make and regarding the teachers’ participation in the induction class. My reflexive field log is an important tool for use in this self-reflection. For all of the reasons stated, I have chosen a qualitative design that uses multiple sources of data to examine the consistency of findings across data sources. My use of an anonymous grounded survey instrument was also an attempt to look for data that either confirmed or disconfirmed evidence I gathered from other sources.
Gaining Entry to the Site

This is the third year I have worked with our personnel director and our lead mentors to help facilitate the teacher induction class, so I did not have any difficulty negotiating entry to the research site. My role in the first year (2003-2004) was somewhat limited; during the second year (2004-2005) I had conducted my pilot study within the induction class setting. At the conclusion of the pilot study, which is described later in this chapter, I talked with the personnel director and lead mentors to share what I had learned and my desire to do my dissertation research with the next year’s class. The personnel director and the four lead mentors were all very interested in seeing what we could learn from the teachers that would help us to improve the induction class for future participants. They expressed their interest and support of the study, so we met and used what I had learned to plan for the 2005-2006 induction class.

Data Sources, Methods, and Procedures

The sources of data for this study consisted of observational data including field notes and reflexive observation notes, course materials, reflective writing, informal audio taped interviews, a grounded survey, and my own reflexive field log. A description of the methods and source of the data corpus follow.

Observational Data

The purposes of observational data are to describe the setting, the people who participated, and the activities of the participants (Patton, 2002). Direct observation allows the observer to better understand and describe the context within which people interact. Field notes are used to describe what is being observed. They are also an
important way to capture and record details so that they can be revisited later. Field notes and reflexive observation notes are two sources of observational data that were used in this study.

Field Notes and Reflexive Observation Notes

Since I co-facilitated the course, I typically wrote notes and observations after the class sessions. These notes included information about the class activities and discussions, the format that was used, and the topics discussed. For two of the meetings I wrote reflexive observation notes, which were similar to field notes but included additional reflexive notes about my involvement and my impressions regarding the teachers’ level of engagement and participation. Reflexive observations notes were used to provide a more detailed record of the January class meeting, and the K-1 small group meeting that was held in February.

During the January class the group of teachers from the K-1 building was not present due to a schedule conflict. That group met separately at a teacher’s house that day and had an informal meeting with their mentors and their principal. Since they had missed the class meeting, the personnel director asked the group to have a small group meeting to fulfill their course requirement for that month. I facilitated that meeting in February at the K-1 building and the small group session was audiotaped to ensure that I could capture everything that was said. I then wrote reflexive observation notes of that meeting using a format that was similar to the write-up for the January meeting. In addition, however I included some quotes from my transcription of the teachers’ discussion so that I could more accurately capture the participants’ responses. Reflexive
notes were also included so that I could describe my impressions regarding the teachers’ discussion and participation.

**Course Materials**

Documents are a form of material culture that can provide a rich source of information about organizations and programs (Patton, 2002). The meaning within documents is not solely determined by the text, but must also be considered within the context of the document’s production and reading (Hodder, 2003). Two sources of documents that were analyzed for this study came from the induction course materials.

The first source was the class handout entitled “The Character of Teaching” (see Appendix E) and represented the schedule of course meetings and topics that would be covered for the teacher induction class. The second source was to obtain background information on the class participants. All teachers in the class were asked to complete a demographic information sheet (see Appendix F), which requested information on the participants’ educational and work experience, and their views about reflection and its impact on their teaching practices. Teachers were also asked to share their preferences concerning the topics they would like to see covered in the course and the formats they preferred for class meetings. These data were used to learn more about the participants and to plan for the subsequent class meetings.

**Reflective Writing**

Reflective journal writing has been shown to be an effective tool for identifying teacher concerns (Uline et al, 2004) and fostering reflective thinking (Bain et al, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Teachers also benefit from receiving personalized feedback
on their reflections (Bain et al, 2002) and reciprocal journal writing has also been shown to successfully engage teachers and facilitators in meaningful dialogue (Dillard, 1996) and to foster improved communication among participants. In this study, interactive and reciprocal journal writing was used to better understand the teachers’ lived experiences. The teachers’ reflective writing served as one source of data for document analysis, and their responses to my writing were utilized as a second source.

Reflections. As a source of data, 36 of the 37 teachers in the class wrote five reflective writing assignments over the course of the year. One teacher was hired later in the first semester and wrote four reflections. I responded to each of those reflections, made copies for my records, and returned the original documents to the teachers. In addition, I wrote five reflective writings, which were also included.

Responses to my reflective writing. Each of the teachers in the class read and responded to my reflective writing assignments. Responses to the first three were required of all participants, and those responses were returned to me. Responses to my fourth and fifth written reflections were optional because teachers’ presentations were scheduled for the last two classes. Teachers were given the option of providing their feedback on the class for their last writing assignment. Since the responses to my fourth and fifth writing were optional and other feedback mechanisms were provided, most teachers did not respond to my final two reflections.

Interviews

As qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of their data, they seek to interpret situations or phenomena based on the meanings that people bring to them
Interviews can be a rich source of data and are used to find out things that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002). Informal conversational interviews are one form of interview that provides an open-ended approach, which allows for a great deal of flexibility. Interviews were based on a grounded approach in two ways. The interviewer typically starts with some basic questions that have emerged as a result of prior data collection. During the interview, however, the interviewer is able to adjust the questions and “go with the flow” (p. 343) depending on where the data leads.

Informal conversational interviews were used in this study to help me better understand the teachers’ perceptions of what impact the induction class and the various activities associated with it, such as reflective writing and small group discussions, had on the teachers personally or professionally. Holloway and Jefferson (1997) suggest using open-ended and appropriate follow-up questions to elicit narrative “stories” from the participants. Using this format, and Ladson-Billings’ (1994) concept of structuring interviews as conversations, teachers were asked questions that asked them to describe their experiences. Some basic questions were developed to provide a starting point for the interviews (see Appendix G). The interviews however, were conversational in nature and were used to get a sense of each teacher’s own story. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to choose the eight teacher participants to interview mid-way through the study. From this group of eight, two of them were selected for final interviews at the end of the school year (see Appendix H). Patton (1990) states, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting
information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 169). My goal in using this approach was to select the cases from which I could learn the most. I interviewed at least one participant from each of the buildings so that I could compare and contrast the experiences of teachers in different buildings. I also interviewed teachers whose experience ranged from that of first year to fifth year teachers to make sure I interviewed participants with differing levels of teaching experience. Two other participants were selected for interviews because they appeared to be outliers whose experiences were not typical, and I thought I could learn from the challenges they faced during their first year in our district. I also felt those interviews could provide a source of disconfirming evidence, since their journey had included some difficulties that were not necessarily typical of the other participants.

Grounded Survey

Using a grounded theory analysis (see data analysis section), and guided by questions that emerged from the study, a grounded survey instrument was created (see Appendix I) and used to triangulate the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Although the survey was anonymous, teachers were asked several general demographic identifiers such as the building they worked in, number of years of experience, and whether they worked in a teaching or non-teaching position. The purpose of these identifiers was to provide context for the data and to identify any patterns that might help to explain it. In addition, due to my role as a district administrator and building principal, I felt it was important to provide the teachers with a safe space to share their true feelings anonymously. Therefore, the survey instrument played an important role in triangulating the data, as I
wanted to see if my findings from other data sources were confirmed on an anonymous instrument.

The survey included a variety of objective questions and four open-ended questions. One section of the survey included ten questions that asked teachers to rate statements using a Likert scale that ranged from a score of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Those questions were used to determine whether teachers believed that the various class components had been helpful to them. The Likert scale allowed for the calculation of frequencies and percents reflecting numbers of teachers who agreed or disagreed with the statements. A second section of the survey asked the teachers to rank the class components from the most helpful (1) to the least helpful (6). A third section asked the teachers to rank eight factors in relation to their importance. Teachers were asked to rank these factors from most important (1) to least important (8) for inclusion in future classes. A final section included three open-ended questions that provided the participants with the opportunity to share their opinions on the class and to make suggestions for the future.

Before giving the survey I had collected, read, and responded to at least four reflective writing assignments from each of the 37 class participants and had conducted the initial eight interviews. While the interviews confirmed findings from the observations and reflective writing, some new themes emerged that I was interested in exploring. For example, as I examined the data I was finding patterns indicating that some of the class components were helpful to the less experienced teachers and were not
as helpful to their veteran counterparts. The grounded survey instrument was used to further explore those differences.

The grounded survey was given to all teachers in attendance at the March class meeting. There were a few teachers who were absent, and they were sent surveys to complete and were asked to return them to my mailbox. Some of those teachers completed and returned their surveys, while others did not. This resulted in a total of 33 surveys from the 37 class participants, which represented 89% of the total.

Reflexive Field Log

Roberts and McGinty (1995) challenge us to be aware of our researcher presence as we develop our “researcher selves” (p. 112) so that we can be aware of “the range of issues” raised by our “presence in the lives of others” (p. 121). A reflexive field log provides one way to document not only the fieldwork involved in the study but the researcher’s thoughts about the work and the impact his or her role has on the participants. My reflexive field log was very important to my study, both as a source of data and a place where I could reflect as I worked through the research process. Therefore, my reflexive field log was also used to record my journey as a researcher.

At the beginning of the teacher induction course I recorded my notes about each class meeting but these notes were minimal. As the course went on, however, I recognized the importance of my role and the impact it had on the participants and the data I was collecting. Starting in December, I began to write more often, and used my reflexive log to document my thoughts as I journeyed through the research process. I recorded notes about the teachers’ participation in the study, as well as my own, and
reflected on each step of the process. That log has become an important source of data as I have often returned to it, and have used it to better understand the teachers’ experiences as well as my own.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year and was ongoing throughout the course of the school year. The teachers met in the induction class seven times during the year, and data were collected during, in between, and after course meetings. A grounded analysis was used to identify emerging themes and patterns in the data.

Grounded Theory

The premise underlying grounded theory is that the data itself is used to determine the codes and categories of study (Clarke, 2003). Continued work with the data allows the researcher to identify emerging themes and patterns, which lead to new and different questions. In this study, as themes emerged from the data I looked for both confirming and disconfirming evidence across the data corpus of reflective writing, responses, interviews, and observations. I found that some assertions were holding true for a majority of participants; however, I also found some situations where there were clear differences among teacher participants. This raised many new questions that continued to shape my study as I began to examine the data to determine whether there were new patterns that I could find among the differences.

A grounded analysis was used to analyze data from the reflective writing, responses, and interview transcripts. As patterns emerged I continued to revisit the data
from those three sources and compared the evidence with teacher responses from the grounded survey. As part of my grounded analysis, I started by reading and rereading the data from teachers’ reflections, their responses to others’ writing, and interview transcripts. As patterns began to emerge across the data I used color to code them in categories. Each time I revisited the data I used new colors to add additional categories to reflect the patterns as they emerged. Information was then organized in tables and synoptic charts to help me make sense of the data (Clarke, 2003). A description of how each of the main data sources was organized and analyzed follows.

**Analysis of Reflective Writing**

During the first stage of my research, data coding procedures included a grounded analysis of the teachers’ five reflective writing assignments. I read each of the teachers’ writings at least twice as I responded to them and then made two copies for my records. One set of reflections was organized and filed by participant code so that I could analyze each participant’s work over the course of the school year. The other copy was filed according to a chronological sequence, putting all first writings together, second writings, etcetera so that I could analyze how the collective writings were similar or different over time.

Writing assignments from the eight interview participants were coded for emergent themes and patterns. In addition, all reflections from other class participants went through multiple readings and were considered for further analysis based upon thematic content. As I worked to reduce the data corpus, I included all reflections and transcripts from the eight interview participants and any writings from other teachers that
provided specific feedback regarding the course. For each of those reflections, different colors were used to code various themes as part of the analysis process. As I proceeded through my study I did multiple readings of the selected reflections and continued to identify and code new patterns and themes as I looked for assertions and supporting warrants in the data.

*Analysis of Responses to Reflective Writing*

Data analysis of responses to the reflective writing also occurred early in the study. During the preliminary stage, I responded to each of the teachers’ writing, and they responded to mine. As those responses were returned to me, I did preliminary data analysis by typing the teacher responses into charts that were organized by general topic. For example, teachers’ comments about reflection were grouped together, as were suggestions for class format or requests for future class topics. I then used that data to help plan upcoming classes in an effort to better meet the teachers’ needs. Although this preliminary analysis of the teachers’ responses was initially used to provide them with a voice in helping to shape the class, the responses were later color coded for emergent patterns and themes, which were used in a constant comparative analysis (Patton, 2002) across and between other sources of data.

*Interviews*

The second phase of my study involved the analysis of my interview data. Transcription of the interviews was an integral part of the data analysis process because it involved making decisions about how the interview would be interpreted, represented, and recorded (Lapadat & Lindsey, 1999). As I transcribed the interviews I continued to
process the information to identify themes and patterns and compare them to those that had emerged from the writing. Preliminary coding involved using the codes I had generated from my work with the teachers’ reflective writing. While rereading the interview transcriptions, I found that the initial codes were no longer sufficient for categorizing the data so new codes and sub-codes were developed. Transcriptions were reviewed across and within participant responses to uncover patterns and emergent themes. I also continued to work back and forth between the reflective writing and the interview transcripts to look for similarities and differences in thematic content.

After the initial coding, I grouped some of the coding categories and began to generate assertions and identify warrants that would support them (Erickson, 1986). Synoptic charts can be very helpful for mapping and organizing qualitative data (Clarke, 2003). I used the Inspiration and Open Mind computer programs to help me create situational maps for grouping my assertions and warrants. Those programs proved to be helpful in organizing my data and working through the data reduction process.

*Grounded Survey*

I entered the third phase of my study with the administration of my grounded survey, which provided an important source of confirming and disconfirming evidence. Frequency charts were used initially to help make sense of the data. I was interested in seeing which of the class components, such as reflective writing or small group discussions, were seen as helpful to the teachers. I was also interested in exploring whether there were similarities or differences that occurred across buildings or across levels of experience.
To analyze the survey data, frequency tables were developed and proportion agreement or disagreement with statements from the survey were calculated. These results were compared with the information I had gathered from the reflective writing and interview transcripts to explore their similarities and differences. Frequency charts were also created to help me better understand the rankings teachers had provided on the second and third sections of the grounded survey. Those were compared to the data from the writing, the interview transcripts, and the other sections of the survey. Finally, I went through the teachers’ comments on the open-ended questions and compared that information to the data from all other sources. I also grouped the surveys by building and experience (first or second year teachers compared to veteran teachers) to further explore the results. As I worked through the data I had collected from the reflections, responses, and interviews, I often went back and forth to the data from my grounded survey to see if it provided confirming or disconfirming evidence. Using this process, I was able to gain a clearer understanding of the multiple perspectives that teachers brought to the class and the impact they believed it had on their personal and professional lives.

Presentation of Data Sources

The following conventions were used for the presentation of data sources. Each of the participants is represented by a pseudonym and are shown in the data sources as a two-letter abbreviation (see Appendix A), and “MP” stands for me, the researcher. Data sources for the results section are indicated by abbreviations that identify the data source and the date the data were collected. Examples are shown below:
W1, W2, W3, W4, W5: reflective writing assignments #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively (e.g., W1-JO/Mar 2006-first reflection from Jody, March, 2006),

R1, R2, R3: responses to my reflections #1, 2, and 3 respectively (e.g., R3-WM/Jan 2006-third response to my reflection from William, January, 2006)

I1: first interview (e.g., I1-PA/Feb 9, 2006-first interview with Patti, February 9, 2006),

I2: final interview (e.g., I2-KT/Jun 8, 2006-second and final interview with Kathleen, June 8, 2006).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) have established several techniques that can be used to establish trustworthiness, or credibility, of findings. I have used several of these methods in my study, including: prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and referential adequacy.

*Prolonged Engagement*

Prolonged engagement is an important element of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and refers to the length of involvement and depth of engagement the researcher has had with the participants. For a study to be trustworthy the researcher needs to have sufficient prolonged engagement with the participants for the reader to feel that his or her work is credible. I have had two different kinds of prolonged engagement with the participants. The first involves my work with the program, and the second involves my work with the teacher participants.
Work with the induction program. I have worked with the personnel director and lead mentors for a total of three years to help facilitate the teacher induction course. The first year I was primarily an observer; however, during that time I was able to conduct a survey study to find out what issues the new teachers felt were most challenging to them during their first year in our district. Those results were shared with the personnel director and lead mentors and were used to help set the class agenda for the next year. During the second year, I conducted a pilot study during which that year’s new teachers wrote reflective writing about their experiences and submitted them to me. I responded back to them and also interviewed one teacher for the study. Results of the pilot study were analyzed to determine changes needed to improve the program the following year for the dissertation study.

The class facilitators all expressed interest in the study and agreed that we should use what had been learned from the pilot study to guide our planning for the 2005-2006 induction program. After two years of previous work with the class facilitators, I have built a strong relationship with the lead mentors, and we have continued to work together as co-facilitators during the 2005-2006 school year as I conducted my dissertation research.

Work with this year’s induction teachers. For this research study, I have also had prolonged engagement with the class participants. I have been involved with this new class of teachers since their first meeting in August and have worked with them all year. I met the teachers and spoke to them during the initial meetings of their two-day orientation, welcoming them and introducing them to the teacher induction course. I have
helped to plan and co-facilitate all seven of the new teacher induction classes that occurred over the course of the year and led an additional small group meeting of the K-1 teachers.

In addition to attending all class meetings, I have written five reflections that I have shared with the new teachers and they responded back to provide me with feedback to help shape the class. I have read and responded to each one of the teachers’ five reflections and have conducted informal interviews with eight of the teachers in the class. I have also had many opportunities in between class meetings to engage in personal conversations and e-mail correspondence with all teachers in the class.

Triangulation

Triangulation is an important technique for providing trustworthiness in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Methods triangulation is one kind of triangulation that can be used to compare the findings across different sources of data. Using methods triangulation, data are collected from a variety of sources to help provide a deeper understanding of the multiple perspectives that individual participants bring to the situation being studied. The purpose of this triangulation goes beyond that of confirming the data from the different data sources. As Patton (2002) indicates:

…understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative and important. Finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study. (p. 556)

In this study, I have used methods triangulation to compare the consistency of findings that have been generated by using different data collection methods. Data
sources include my own field notes, reflexive observation notes, reflexive field log, the
five reflective writings that were collected from each of the 37 participants, the teacher
responses to my own reflections, interview transcripts, and a grounded survey instrument.
As part of this triangulation I have compared the findings from each data source with
those that were generated by other methods to look for both confirming and
disconfirming evidence.

*Member Check*

Member check is a technique that provides trustworthiness to a study because it
involves the participants in verifying the accuracy of the data. In this study, interview
participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts and check them for
accuracy. A majority of the teachers responded and indicated that the interviews were
accurate, and one teacher made a few suggestions that she believed were important to
provide clarity. Her requested corrections were made to the transcripts. Two of the eight
teachers did not respond to the request for feedback. Informal member checks also
occurred throughout the conversational interviews when I restated the teachers’
comments in my own words and asked them to verify whether I had clearly captured their
intended meaning.

Teachers were also asked to read each of my first three reflective writings and
respond back to me. As I shared what I was learning from the data in my writing, having
the teachers respond back to those reflections provided me with another informal form of
member check. In those responses, teachers often added their personal opinions in notes
that referenced specific portions of my writing. Many teachers also added notes of
appreciation for being provided with a means to provide feedback and offer their suggestions for the class.

Referential Adequacy

The data corpus for this study included background information forms that were completed for each of the 37 teachers. The teachers also each wrote five reflective writing assignments (except for one teacher who began the class later in the year) to which I read and responded. A total of 184 teacher reflections were read, reviewed and selectively analyzed. Following an initial read of all data, reflections were further analyzed if they included substantive thematic content that was aligned with the emerging themes and patterns that resulted from preliminary coding. In addition, a majority of the 37 teachers responded to each of my first three reflections, and a total of 92 substantive responses were charted and typed into three tables to help track the data and use it to plan for subsequent class meetings. Ten 45-minute interviews were audio taped, transcribed and analyzed for this study. A grounded survey was also completed and collected from 33 of the 37 class participants.

Timeline of the Study

All data were collected over the course of the 2005-2006 school year. Field notes and observational data were collected and written up after the class sessions. Teachers’ reflections were collected at the October, December, January, February, and March class meetings. The first round of interviews was conducted during the middle of the year in February and March, and final interviews were conducted in June. Data analysis was ongoing and continued through July of 2006.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The analysis of the data is presented in three sections. In the first section the first two research questions are addressed. The teachers’ perceptions of the induction class components are described in terms of components they perceived were helpful during their induction year, and benefits they perceived they gained as part of their participation in the learning community. In addition, components that emerged throughout the course including the small discussion groups and my role in the course are also addressed in this section. The second section examines the teachers’ perceptions regarding the challenges that were present as part of their participation in the learning community. The final section addresses the teachers’ perceptions regarding how the implementation of reflection strategies will impact their future use of those strategies during their teaching. In the sections where the grounded survey specifically provided additional data, these data will be included.

Teachers’ Perceptions Regarding Induction Class Components

The goal of this teacher induction class was for the co-facilitators to work collaboratively with the induction teachers to create a learning community where teachers could share and reflect on the problems of their practice in an effort to foster their own learning as reflective practitioners. Based on the results of the pilot study from the
previous year, the course was initially designed to include two major components: reflective writing and responses to others’ reflective writing. These components were specifically chosen and implemented as tools to promote teacher reflection and professional growth based on the relevant literature on reflection (Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) and journal writing (Boud, 2001; Moon, 1999; Dillard, 1996). A third strategy, small discussion groups, emerged as a class component when a majority of teachers indicated that preference on an informational survey completed during the first class. A final component involving my participation in the course emerged during data analysis. This section examines each of these components to determine what benefits the teachers’ perceived they gained from their participation in the learning community and addresses the following research questions:

1. What components in the induction class were perceived by the teachers as helpful during their induction year?

2. What do participants perceive are the benefits of their participation in this learning community that is focused on reflection?

Benefits of Reflective Writing

All teacher participants were involved in writing five reflections over the course of the school year as a requirement for the course. In my role as a co-facilitator of the class, I also wrote five reflections, which were shared with class participants. During the first class the teachers were given the article, *Listening to Other Voices: A Description of Teacher Reflection in the United States*, by Linda Valli (1997) and a selection from the book, *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*, by Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston (1996). Teachers were asked to read those texts for the course in order to help them
understand that their reflections were to be focused on issues or problems they were
dealing with as part of their teaching practice. Reflective writing assignments were
collected at the October, November, January, February and March class meetings. I wrote
my response on the teachers’ reflections, made two copies for my records, and returned
the originals to the class participants.

The literature on reflective journal writing suggests it can be used as a tool to
support teacher reflection (Boud, 2001; Carter, 1998; Moon, 1999; Dillard, 1996).
Reflective writing was chosen as a course component in an effort to engage the teachers
in reflection about their daily practice. The writing assignments were open-ended, and
teachers were given the choice of what they wanted to write about. The only requirement
was that they were asked to reflect on specific problems or challenges that they were
dealing with in their daily practice. This decision to allow teacher choice was based on
the format preferences teachers shared on their background information forms. Data
regarding the reflective writings and the writing process were collected from teacher
interviews, reflective writings, teachers’ responses to others’ writing, and the grounded
survey.

*Helpful in teachers’ learning.* A majority of the teachers indicated that they had
found the process of reflective writing to be helpful to them in their learning as a teacher.
All seven of the first year teachers interviewed and several additional teachers who wrote
about writing reflections shared that they found the process to be helpful. For example,
Jerome shared this:

> Although I sometimes put off writing my reflections to the last minute and I
> sometimes found them to be annoying to do, I do believe that writing these
> reflections has allowed me to grow a tremendous amount in my first year. I try to
constantly think about how I may improve as a teacher or what things that I can do better as a teacher. However it is not until I start writing and really thinking about things do these ideas or thoughts usually come to the foreground. The reflection has been a beneficial piece for me. (W5-JM/Mar 2006)

Another first year teacher, Bob, shared similar thoughts:

It is often very challenging to remember and find time to reflect and read others’ reflections, but it is an extremely important and effective tool. Taking that time is helping me to discover and realize positive and negative aspects of my teaching. (R3-BO/Jan 2006)

Teachers indicated that writing about the issues they were dealing with allowed them to gain new perspective, and through that process they were able to think of ideas and alternative solutions to their problems. Kathleen provided a clearer understanding of the process in this passage from her interview:

I think there are a lot of advantages to the reflective writing…I mean you’re always reflecting on your practice. It makes you really think through things, and a lot of times when you do that, and you’re writing it down, solutions can come to you. Like if you’re having a problem, you know, you kind of work through those things in your head and say, ok, well I really could do this differently…or, you know, maybe you don’t have a solution, and that’s where it’s really helpful to get the feedback from the other two people that are reading your reflections. (I1-KT/Feb 17, 2006)

This pattern was consistently found among experienced teachers as well. For example, Marlene, an experienced veteran shared, “I find the reflections to hold a lot of insight for me personally” (R3-MR/Jan 2006). With the exception of two teachers, all teachers who wrote about the reflective writing process indicated that it had been helpful to them, although they each took different things from the process.

Ensuring that teachers take time to reflect. The most prevalent pattern that emerged from the data was that a majority of the induction teachers believed that writing the reflections had required them to take the time to reflect on their teaching and
thoughtfully think through the challenges they were facing. Those teachers shared that they knew that reflection was important and would make them a better teacher. They also stated, however, that if they had not been required to write the reflections they would not necessarily have found the time to reflect on their teaching. As Patti, a first year teacher said, “…the most time that I do get to reflect is when I’m doing the reflections with you” (I1-PA/Feb 9, 2006).

Teachers from all buildings and experience levels shared that although they had difficulty finding the time to reflect on their practice, the writing assignments helped them to slow down and make time to reflect on their teaching. For example, Kelli, a 2-5 teacher with two years of experience, shared a typical response about how the process worked for her:

I was surprised to find that the reflections turned out to be as helpful as they were. I have a hard time slowing down and thinking about teaching—there’s a constant pressure of things to do. However, when I stopped to write things down in an organized way, I tended to have a different perspective and I could see where I needed to make course corrections. Although we were asked to write reflections on a monthly basis, I can see the benefits of reflecting at least every week. It’s a great way to become a better teacher faster. (W5-KE/Mar 2006)

This pattern was consistent across experience levels. Marlene, a 19-year veteran wrote the following:

...as much as I hate to sit down and write, in the end, I find this opportunity has been helpful as a personal reflection. It has assisted me in validating what I am doing and pondering where I need to go next. (W5-MR/Mar 2006)

All seven first year teachers interviewed said that they believed the reflective writings had been helpful to them; however, another first year teacher who wasn’t interviewed, Jody, indicated in her last reflection that her least favorite part of the class
was writing the reflections. She did not say that the reflective writing process had not been helpful. Instead, she reported that since the teachers in her group tended to talk about what they had written in their reflections her preference would have been to do oral reflections in the small group rather than written ones. Her suggestion for future induction classes was for the teachers to engage in reflection as they talked in their small discussion groups and to be limited to one or two reflective writings over the course of the year.

*Venting Leads to Dialogue and Resolution.* For some first year teachers, writing reflections provided an opportunity to vent their concerns about challenges they were facing. For example, Patti, a K-1 teacher, had written about a challenging issue and shared these comments about the writing process:

…so I got a lot of steam off by writing it to you…the first reflection I turned in to you was three pages long (she is laughing as she says this)…and it took me like five minutes to write because….I’m typing away and typing away…then it just felt nice…(a little later in the conversation) …and I didn’t want to admit that, but it’s true! I did feel better after venting…not really venting, but just expressing my feelings about things… (I1-PA/Feb 9, 2006)

Although Patti had indicated in her interview that she did not look forward to writing the reflections, she also stated that she believed they ended up being beneficial to her in helping her think through and resolving the issues. Patti shared that she used the reflective writing as a safe space to vent her feelings as she thought through some of the challenges she was facing in her teaching. That was confirmed again at a later point in Patti’s interview, when she shared that over time she became much more comfortable writing the reflections and compared the process to writing a diary. By taking the time to write about her concerns, she was able to voice thoughts and opinions that she may not
have been comfortable sharing with her colleagues. The process also provided a safe space to sort through and think about specific issues or challenges she was facing. That was clearly important to her as she indicated later in the interview when she said, “And you’ve been great at letting us feel safe to be able to write things. Like I would feel like anything that I wrote that you would kind of…that you would keep that to yourself” (I1-PA/Feb 9, 2006).

Some of the teachers who used the reflections to vent their frustration also used the writing to begin a dialogue with me about issues they were struggling with in their practice. In those situations, they tended to write more in-depth descriptions of their challenges and then went on to share the questions they were trying to work through. Those questions then provided an opportunity for me to follow up with ideas or suggestions for them to consider. An example of this can be found in Angela’s second reflection, which can be better understood within the context of the situation she was dealing with.

Angela, a first-year middle school teacher, began her reflection by saying, “I started writing this reflection as a means to vent some frustration” (W2-AG/Jan 2006). This statement was written at a time when Angela had many questions regarding the curriculum. She wrote about half of her reflection and ended it with these questions and thoughts, “...am I doing this right, am I teaching to the right level, are there better methods I can be incorporating? These questions started causing me to doubt that I was/am being an effective teacher” (W2-AG/Jan 2006).
Angela started this reflection to vent her frustration, but as she continued to reflect on her situation she found herself asking some difficult questions that she could not answer. She stopped writing her reflection and set it aside in frustration. Due to her continued struggle with this issue she did not finish her reflection until several weeks later after she had individual conversations about the issue with her mentor, with one of her colleagues, and with me. In our meeting Angela shared that she felt she would benefit from having the time to work through some of those curriculum issues with her grade level colleagues. I suggested that she use a professional development day to meet with other teachers from her department to work on curriculum and identify grade level indicators and examples. Angela met with her colleagues and talked with them about the curriculum issues. She was then able to finish writing the reflection and described how she had worked through her curriculum challenges.

Later, during her interview, Angela confirmed that the reflective writing had been useful in helping her to work through those issues. She stated, “The writing, on the other hand, helped me again to clarify challenges that I was facing” (I1-AG/Mar 14, 2006). Although she had initially used her reflection to vent her frustrations, she eventually revisited those reflections and went on to share her questions and initiate further conversation with me about her situation.

Patti and Angela both shared that writing reflections provided them with a safe space to vent their frustrations; however further discussion with them revealed that the initial venting of their concerns moved them toward a process of reflection. Once their initial frustrations had been voiced they continued to reflect on the issues and look for
possible solutions to the challenges they faced. In Angela’s case, those continued reflections led to additional conversations and meetings, which in turn led to her taking specific action that brought resolution to the issue.

*Opening a line of communication.* While writing reflections provided some teachers with the opportunity to vent and begin a dialogue about problems they were facing, it also provided an avenue for teachers to initiate other forms of conversation with me. Katie, a middle school teacher with five prior years of experience, did not use the writing to vent about problems, but saw it as an additional opportunity to communicate with me and get to know me better. She explained it by saying:

> Also, writing the reflections opened up a line of communication with you and I. I probably found this to be one of the best things from this class! Since we don’t get a chance to see each other very often and talk about teaching (or non-related school things), I felt that by reading your feedback and your reflections, this gave me the opportunity to get to know you a little better to feel more comfortable (W5-KH/Mar 2006).

Although no one else specifically wrote about this topic, the process where I wrote my own reflections and read and responded to those written by the teachers did provide an extra tool for communication between us. Those additional opportunities to interact with teachers helped me to get to know them better; however, it was not clear whether other induction teachers from my building or district shared similar feelings.

I revisited this theme in my final interview with Kathleen in an attempt to better understand her perspective on the impact my role in the reflective writing process had on her as a class participant. During that interview Kathleen had previously shared that she believed the reflective writing had been very beneficial to her and stated that she had found my comments to be valuable. As she shared her insights I asked her to expand on
how my role may have fit into that process. She shared her thoughts in the following exchange with me:

MP: …in trying to think about my role in this study I’ve tried to think about…when I look at the people that really seemed to gain something from say the writing or the responses…is it because there’s some sort of relationship we’ve been able to build?

KT: I think that’s part of it…but I also think that because you have something invested in this class…meaning you’re very interested in the first year teacher’s experience…or just like someone new to the district…you know…from the beginning I’ve known that you’re interested in how we progress with things and that you take it…you take it to heart…It’s something that’s important to you. I think that just comparing your responses to maybe another classmate’s responses…you take a lot of time… You know, instead of maybe just like one sentence at the end of the reflection…which is what would happen.

M: From a colleague?

K: Right, so I guess it just showed that you were interested in what was going on with us and…it was valuable for you to learn about those things. (I2-KT/Jun 8, 2006)

In summary, a majority of teachers from all buildings and experience levels agreed that the reflective writing had been helpful to them and this was confirmed by data from the grounded survey. According to the grounded survey, 26 of the 33 survey respondents (79%) either agreed or strongly agreed that writing reflections for the course had helped them to take time to reflect on their practice. Five respondents (15%) said that they were not sure if the writing had been helpful, and 2 respondents (6%) disagreed with the statement. Thus, while a majority of the teachers believed that the reflective writing was helpful, the grounded survey data indicates that not all teachers believed the process was beneficial to them. This is not altogether surprising because some of the teachers turned in their written reflections late, which may have been an indication that they did
not see the process as valuable. Not all teachers were interviewed, and not all of the class participants chose to write about the reflective writing process, so the anonymous grounded survey provides valuable data in terms of this question. In addition, differences in the grounded survey may reflect the fact that some of the teachers may not have been comfortable mentioning that they did not find the reflections to be helpful.

**Benefits of My Feedback on Reflections**

Each time the teachers wrote one of their five reflections I responded by writing my own comments, suggestions, and feedback in the margins before I returned them. Through this process I attempted to provide not only support for the teachers’ efforts, but substantive feedback to encourage them to consider alternative perspectives and reflect more deeply on their issues or concerns. Many teachers commented in their writing, responses and interviews that they valued that feedback for a variety of reasons. In some cases, teachers simply expressed their appreciation for my involvement in the process. For example, Marlene, an experienced educator from the K-1 building shared these comments in response to my third reflection, “I think it is an incredible inspiration for you to be doing what you ask from the students. I am in awe with the depth of your responses to me and then multiply that by the whole class—Wow!” (R3-MR/Jan 2006)

In other situations, teachers stated that they appreciated the feedback because it provided some validation for their work. For example, in the following excerpt Kathleen, a first year teacher of middle and high school students, shared that she valued the process for the following reasons:

…I really appreciate getting those comments because again, it’s just another form of dialogue where it acts as kind of a form of reassurance that you know…
doing the right things, I am making the right decisions with...like my curriculum or just how to approach something with teaching...(11-KT/February 17, 2006).

Teachers shared that they appreciated that the feedback was thoughtful and substantive in nature. Several teachers also noted that they had also been able to use some of the suggestions and ideas that had been shared. All eight teachers who were interviewed shared positive comments about my feedback, as did many other teachers in their reflections and responses.

Data from the grounded survey also confirmed the results that were received from the interviews and written reflections. Of the 33 teachers who responded to the grounded survey 31 (94%) of them either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Receiving feedback on my reflections from the facilitator was helpful.” Two of the respondents, however, indicated that they were not sure if it was helpful, so at least two of the class participants may feel that they did not benefit from the process.

Benefits of Teachers’ Responses to Other Teachers’ Reflections

A second component of the course involved the teachers in writing responses to others’ reflections. For that component, all teachers were asked to trade a copy of their reflections with another class participant. After reading their colleague’s writing, they were asked to respond to it and return the reflection to the teacher with their own feedback added. Those responses were shared with the participants and were not collected as a requirement for the course.

Five out of the eight teachers interviewed indicated that they had either not received responses from other teachers or had not found the responses from their colleagues to be particularly helpful. The data on this topic, however, varied according to
the specific situation for each building’s group. For example, the two teachers interviewed from the K-1 building stated that since their group missed the January class meeting they did not trade their papers with a colleague. At that time both of them reported that they had traded and received a response on their first reflection, but had not remembered to trade in the two subsequent meetings, and didn’t know if their K-1 colleagues had exchanged theirs or not. Even though they had not continued to participate in the process, one of those teachers, Katie, stated that she liked getting responses from others because of the ideas people could share. She also believed it was good to respond to other people’s writing because she found it helpful to think about other people’s issues as well as her own.

The interview with Rachel, a teacher from the 2-5 building, revealed a different story for the teachers in her small group. Rachel indicated that her group members regularly exchanged their reflections and gave each other feedback. She believed those responses were helpful in building trusting relationships with her colleagues and in providing useful feedback. She also noted that, “…a few times I got really good suggestions” (I1-RA/Mar 14, 2006). Rachel did not believe there were any disadvantages to the process, except to note that the one time she wanted to share a personal issue with me she had to word that carefully in her reflection since others in her group would read it.

At the middle school level, the teachers interviewed had mixed responses. Two of the teachers, Bob and Kathleen, had positive perceptions regarding the process. Bob liked having other teachers read his reflections and stated that just knowing more than one person was going to read it and respond to it encouraged him to take the reflective writing
process more seriously. He stated, “having that knowledge that people are going to read it and give you feedback you kind of put a little bit more into it…and you actually think a little bit more about your reflection” (II-BO/Mar 6, 2006).

Kathleen also valued the process of having another teacher read her writing and said, “…being able to voice things, I think it’s really important, and knowing that someone else is reading it” (II-KT/Feb 17, 2006). Kathleen also felt that reading each other’s writing and responding to it provided yet another way of communicating with her colleagues. In the same interview, she shared these thoughts about the process: “…you know, reading other people’s things to see that they go through the same things…it’s just a different form of dialogue” (II-KT/Feb 17, 2006).

Bob expressed similar sentiments about reading his colleague’s reflections and stated that reading each other’s writing was important because it allowed them to share their problems in a collegial context and work toward solutions. He also felt it was reassuring to read that others were facing similar challenges. He said:

…about responding to other reflection papers…it’s nice to actually read someone else’s thoughts and reflections and see that you are not alone in certain areas. It’s comforting to have that and be able to respond and give your comment on that. So it’s very helpful. (II-BO/Mar 6, 2006)

Although some teachers at both the elementary and middle school level believed that the responses from a colleague were beneficial, some of their colleagues did not agree that the process was helpful (see next section of chapter). In one additional case, the teacher had mixed feelings. In that situation Jody, a first-year high school teacher, indicated that she had traded her papers with another teacher who works with resource students in her curricular area of science. She stated that while she did receive some
helpful feedback, they typically discussed the reflections in their small group setting, so any written responses tended to be redundant.

In summary, the majority of teachers interviewed stated that receiving responses from their colleagues was not especially helpful. Some of them received little or no feedback from their colleagues, and others stated that the responses were not substantive. While three teachers had participated in the process all year and indicated that they believed it had been beneficial to them, six other teachers reported that they either had very little participation in the process or just did not find it to be especially helpful.

The grounded surveys also provided an additional source of data. Twenty-seven of the 33 survey participants (82%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Receiving feedback on my reflections from a colleague was helpful.” Four of the remaining teachers indicated that they were not sure, one disagreed with the statement, and the final participant strongly disagreed with the statement. At first glance these data would appear to indicate that a majority of the teachers found the process to be helpful; however, there are other factors that may need to be considered. For example, in the interviews some of the teachers said they believed feedback from their colleagues was helpful, but indicated that they did not receive that feedback very often. In other data, some of the teachers said they received helpful feedback from their colleagues in the small discussion groups when they talked about their reflections. Therefore, it appears that the survey question may not have been clearly worded, which makes it difficult to distinguish whether the participants were positively referencing the written responses from other teachers or the verbal feedback they received in their small discussion groups.
Benefits of Teachers’ Responses to My Writing

The component of having teachers respond to my writing was specifically designed and implemented to provide induction teachers with the means to share their input into the development of the course. Learning can be seen as a situated activity that is closely tied to the social context in which it occurs and this component was selected to involve the teachers in developing the social context of the class. Learners also participate in communities of practice and the mastery of knowledge and skill requires that newcomers move from peripheral involvement toward full participation in the practices of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using this sociocultural perspective, induction teachers can be seen as learners that are developing the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful participants in their communities of practice. Induction teachers therefore benefit from having additional support to negotiate their transition into their school and their district. The teachers’ responses to my writing allowed them to have a voice in sharing their ideas on how we could provide that support and shape the class to better meet their needs.

Induction teachers perceived that they were provided with additional support as a result of being able to share their ideas and feedback through the response process. Sometimes the teachers shared general comments about this, such as these remarks made by Jody, a first year teacher, in her final reflection: “There are several aspects of the course that made the experience meaningful. Overall, the most important is the support” (W5-JO/Mar 2006). These comments were also prevalent in experienced teachers’ reflections and responses. For example, Marlene a 19-year veteran wrote:
I am very appreciative for the support I get just for asking... Too often new staff feel they are all alone and expected to do all the right things all the time. I haven’t observed this here! This sense of community and vested interest in our newest members is so critical. (R3-MR/Mar 2006)

Sometimes the teachers had requested information about specific topics and were appreciative when those needs were met. For example, early in the course many teachers had expressed an interest in learning more about the district’s evaluation process, the Praxis evaluation process, and the way parent conferences are conducted in the buildings. In an effort to be responsive to their needs that information was shared during segments of the first class sessions. Both beginning and experienced teachers indicated that having some time set aside to meet those requests was perceived to be helpful. That was demonstrated in Bill’s comments when he said, “I loved hearing about how to prepare for evaluations. I think most new teachers have some apprehension about being evaluated” (W5-BL/Mar 2006).

As the course progressed, the induction teachers continued to share that the process of responding to my reflections was helpful in providing them input into class decisions. As part of this process the induction teachers had responded to my first three reflections by writing their comments and responses directly on my reflections and returning them to me. I used my reflective writing to share and reflect upon what I was learning about the class, and then asked the teachers questions about how the class was working for them. The teachers responded by sharing their comments and often addressed specific class components, such as the reflective writing or small discussion groups. (Data from those responses have been included in those respective sections of this chapter.) As I received the teachers’ responses I typed up charts to organize their
remarks by categories. Within those categories I grouped the information according to the participant’s building. These data were used as a member check to help me better understand the teachers’ experiences as class participants. It also provided information that was helpful for planning the upcoming classes.

The most prevalent theme within participants’ responses was that teachers valued the collaborative nature of the course. They perceived that it was very beneficial to be able to share their ideas on what they wanted and needed from the course and have input into class decisions. They also valued the process and appreciated the time I was investing in writing reflections and responses (see later section). The teachers’ comments, however, were often specifically focused on the process itself, and the value they placed on being able to have input into the course agenda. For example, Emma shared the following about the process in her final reflection:

The first thing I would keep the same is structuring class topics around teacher needs. I believe it would be pointless to spend class after class discussing issues that really aren’t issues among new staff. It was nice to have someone ask me what I [original in italics] thought was of importance and try to accommodate my needs with the rest of those in class. I know that it would have taken ten more classes to discuss every [italics in original] concern, and I really feel that a happy medium was achieved and I appreciate the hard work that went into it. (W5-EM/Apr, 2006)

The teachers did not comment much on the actual writing of their responses to me, and no teacher suggested that writing responses was the best way to provide their input. Instead they commented, as Emma did, that they valued having a process that allowed them to share their wants and needs. Therefore, the ability to share their ideas and suggestions appeared to be more important than the vehicle that was used to obtain their input.
Benefits of Small Discussion Groups

The use of small discussion groups emerged as the third component for the course as a result of the teachers’ responses to the initial teacher questionnaire. These groups became a regular class strategy based on the teachers’ continued support and requests for this format. While a limited amount of literature exists on this topic, that literature suggests that small discussion groups can be used to encourage teachers to dialogue and reflect on the problems of their practice (Cady, 1998; Glazer et al, 2004; Carver, 2004). This was the emphasis of the small discussion groups in this induction course. At the teachers’ request, the small discussion groups became a primary area of focus for the course.

The pattern that most quickly emerged from the data was that a majority of induction teachers from all four buildings and experience levels valued the time they spent in small discussion groups talking with their colleagues about their daily practice. The teachers seemed to share Bill’s feelings as he noted in his first response, “Time to talk to other teachers is very powerful” (R1-BL/Oct 2005). This pattern initially emerged from the teachers’ responses to my first reflection. At that time the teachers overwhelmingly indicated that the small discussion groups were the most effective component of the course because they provided them with the opportunity to talk with their colleagues about important aspects of their teaching. This theme was also woven through the teachers’ reflective writing and the interviews and continued to be prevalent throughout the entire year. Teachers appreciated the small discussion groups for a variety of reasons.
Talking about teaching helps teachers learn. Jerome, a first year middle school teacher, valued the small discussion groups because he could talk about his teaching. He shared his thoughts in this statement, “For me, I took the most out of the class when we shared and discussed ideas in small groups with other first year teachers” (W5-JM/Mar 2006). This comment can be interpreted more fully by looking within the context of Jerome’s experience through analysis of his other reflective writings. In Jerome’s first reflection he explained that he had faced many challenges during his first year of teaching and stated that he had found two ways of addressing them. His first strategy involved taking the time to reflect on his lessons and his students to think about how he could improve his teaching. The second strategy was to turn to other teachers and colleagues for advice on the situations he was facing. Jerome states, “These strategies allow me to see the strengths of my teaching but to also seek out the improvements in my teaching ability” (W1-JM/Oct 2005).

Using that information to provide the context for Jerome’s statement, he indicates that the small discussion groups provided a safe place where he could ensure there would be time set aside to talk with other teachers as he worked to improve his practice. Each time the class met during their small group time, the teachers were free to discuss topics of their choice. These discussions could include, but were not limited to situations they had written about in their reflections or were working through with students, parents, or teachers. Jerome’s comments indicate that he valued using the discussion groups as a forum where he could reflect and talk through issues with his colleagues as he worked to improve his teaching.
This was also true for teachers who worked in other buildings. At the high school level, Jody, a first-year teacher wrote:

On a daily basis I am not able to get out and talk to all the other teachers about concerns I may have or situations I may be facing, or vice versa. It was nice to get together and talk about these concerns and receive feedback and suggestions from others, as well as give my opinion and see what others thought about the approach I would take. (W5-JO/Mar 2006).

Jody also clearly viewed the discussion groups as a place where she could safely talk to other teachers about her teaching. She indicated that she felt comfortable sharing her concerns in this setting and requesting feedback and suggestions from her peers. Jody also indicated that in her discussion group she felt comfortable taking risks. Not only was she willing to share her own ideas about how she could address the problem, she was also comfortable asking her colleagues to share their opinions about her plan to address the problem. This would suggest that Jody has developed a bond with her group that allowed her to feel she could trust them to take her concerns seriously and address them in a positive and nonjudgmental manner.

As teachers talked to their colleagues about teaching they also appreciated the opportunity to obtain advice or new ideas from their peers. For example, Maggie, a second year teacher from the K-1 building stated, “I always feel as if talking to colleagues is helpful because they typically offer sound advice based on their personal experiences” (R1-MK/Oct 2005). In another example, Edward, a first year middle school teacher said, “I have found conversations can be the best source of ideas and inspiration” (R1-ED/Oct 2005). In addition, a large number of the teachers responding to my reflections specifically commented on how helpful it was to be able to have conversations
with experienced teachers about teaching. This theme was found in 14 teacher responses that were received from teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school settings.

The teachers also perceived that talking to their colleagues about their teaching contributed to their learning. For example, Edward, a first year middle school teacher said, “I wish I could find even more time (to talk to other teachers) because talking through with others has helped me learn even more” (R3-ED/Jan 2006). Experienced teachers also shared these sentiments as well. Ann, an experienced teacher from the 2-5 building, wrote this in her final reflection:

I also liked the fact that because we were a smaller group, we were more comfortable to discuss and share ideas about the scenarios presented. As we talked, other ideas were brought to the table and we could then discuss those. I felt that this type of situation, whether we discussed classroom management or anything else, led to a more comfortable atmosphere and more was learned during that class. (W5-AN/Mar 2006)

*Building relationships and trust.* The induction teachers also valued the discussion groups because they perceived that component helped them to get to know other teachers and build relationships with their peers. This pattern was prevalent in the reflections and interviews from teachers of all buildings and all experience levels. A majority of induction teachers agreed that the discussion groups helped them to build relationships because that environment provided a safe space where they could talk and get to know other teachers better. For example, Emma, an experienced middle school teacher stated, “Working in small groups keeps you within a comfort zone, therefore making you more willing to open up about joys and concerns.” (W5-EM/Apr, 2006).

This time was especially important for teachers who did not have the opportunity to see their group members during the workday. For example, Rachel, a first year teacher
in the 2-5 building wrote, “I always looked forward to small group time with a few girls from my building! It was during this time that we were able to share what was going good for each of us as well as struggles” (W5-RA/Mar 2006). Rachel typically did not have much time to sit down and talk with her colleagues about the good things that were happening or the problems she was experiencing. Rachel clearly looked forward to those discussions, and having the time set aside for them during the induction class meetings ensured that there would be time for those conversations to take place.

Rachel also expanded upon her thinking in her interview. At that time she indicated that those conversations and discussions were important, along with the responses to each other’s reflective writing, in helping her to develop trusting relationships with the teachers from her small group. She indicated that in those groups:

…you’re kind of building a trust relationship with that person by sharing, you know, what good things are going on for you and then also…if you have struggles, you know, you open yourself up to them. (I1-RA/Mar 14, 2006)

While this pattern was found in a majority of responses, it could most clearly be seen in the responses from staff members who worked in multiple buildings. Teachers who shared their time between buildings seemed to have an even greater need to build relationships with others, which may be because they had more limited opportunities to meet people and interact with their peers in those settings. For example, Lauren, a first year staff member who worked in both the middle school and high school, said, “I see this time as a way to meet people” (R1-LN/Oct 2005).

Kathleen, who teaches both middle and high school students also stated, “The chance to talk to other teachers is important to me as I don’t get many chances to talk
with other teachers” (R1-KT/Oct 2005). Kathleen’s situation can be better understood by looking at the context within which she worked. She teaches one high school class and four middle school classes, but her classroom is located in the high school building. There are a few teachers in the same building that also teach middle school students, but those teachers are at the far end of the hallway and are not readily accessible for conversations between classes or before or after school. Therefore, Kathleen has faced some unique challenges in teaching from a classroom that is in a different building from most of her middle school peers. She described her situation in this way:

I teach mostly middle school and I’m in the high school building, so my middle school students come to me and then the high schoolers are there. And then at the beginning of the year I don’t think that the high school teachers around me knew that I was so new. You know…new to the city, new to the district, new to, you know, teaching in a public school. So they kind of just left me alone… (I1-KT/Feb 17, 2006)

In her interview, Kathleen described the sense of isolation she felt at the beginning of the school year and revisited that theme several times, saying that she discovered the importance of developing relationships “…in a different way…or a bigger way, I think, than maybe some of the other teachers that are in this new class because I am in the other building. I am pretty isolated…” (I1-KT/Feb 17, 2006). Kathleen may have placed a higher importance on the teacher induction class as a means of developing those relationships because she did not have the same opportunities as other teachers to interact with her middle school colleagues during the school day. To further complicate the situation, Kathleen did not have the opportunity to talk with her neighboring high school teachers between classes either, because they were on a different bell schedule and
typically didn’t change classes at the same time she did. As a result, Kathleen viewed the teacher induction class as one of her primary ways to build relationships with her peers. 

Although a majority of the teachers in the class felt that the small discussion groups were helpful to them, the experience was considerably different for every participant. Each teacher’s lived experience was unique, and all data collected is recognized to be partial and perceptival. The data definitely does not reveal the whole picture, or even a majority of it, but rather provides a glimpse of some portion of the participants’ experiences. Through analysis of the reflective writing, responses and the interviews, however, an additional pattern emerged for beginning teachers that was unique to their situation and was likely the result of their limited experience.

*Receiving reassurance from others.* A majority of first year teachers shared that they valued small discussion groups because those conversations also helped them to receive reassurance that they were not alone in feeling the way they did. In Kathleen’s situation (see section above) she described her feelings in this way:

I think the most important thing I’ve gained from that is being able to talk to other new teachers and know that I am not alone in my feelings. And I think this is where also being in my room that I’m in has, you know, made me a little more anxious at the beginning of the year because I didn’t see those other new teachers. I wasn’t able to have those, you know, real regular conversations with them. There is one other new social studies teacher for the middle school in my building, and we were able to…like talk at lunch and those kind of things so that helped. But coming together for those classes, it was…it was really nice, even just to see the other two members of my own department during that time and to be able to talk with them about the stresses about not having our supplies in yet, and all that kind of stuff. (I1-KT/Feb 17, 2006)

Although teachers who shared responsibilities in more than one building seemed to feel this need most acutely, this pattern emerged across the reflections and interviews.
of a majority of first year teachers. First year teachers in all buildings shared that they valued the relationships they formed in discussion groups because in those settings they were able to receive reassurance that they were not alone in the challenges they faced. Sometimes those comments were stated in response to my writing, such as when Bob, a first year middle school teacher, said, “It is reassuring to talk to others and see that others feel the same way I do” (R2-BO/Dec 2005). Elizabeth, a first year teacher from the K-1 building shared similar sentiments when she wrote, “It also helps to hear that others have some of the same difficulties and struggles. We are all in this together” (R3-EL/Jan 2006).

This need for reassurance was typically also closely linked to the teachers’ need to build relationships with others. This can be clearly seen in Rachel’s interview as she talked about the small group discussions:

> It was helpful to see that you weren’t the only person struggling with some things…so I think that brought us closer…and knowing that if I heard something that was really great I could go back to that person and say, How did you do that again? Just having that kind of relationship…to be able to talk to them more, you know, openly…and it helps to get to know them better (I1-RA/Mar 14, 2006).

Rachel’s small group was made up of four teachers from the 2-3 building and the building’s permanent substitute. Although the teachers were allowed to form groups of their choice during each class session, Rachel’s group stayed the same over the course of the year and continued to meet during the induction class each month. Rachel indicated that it was reassuring to see that others were facing the same challenges but also shared that her desire to meet with the discussion groups went beyond the need for reassurance,
as these groups became a place where she could also build relationships with her colleagues and get to know them better.

Teachers saw these groups as providing a safe space where they could be comfortable sharing their concerns with others and receiving reassurance from their colleagues that they were not alone in facing those issues. This was a common thread that was woven through many of the first year teachers’ reflections. For example, Angela, a first year middle school teacher, wrote the following about her experiences within her discussion group:

This gave me a chance to develop a comfort level and establish some personal relationships that I would not have otherwise had the opportunity to form. It was also a safe, informal, comfortable place to just vent. Being able to do this helped me recognize that many of the challenges I was facing were typical of being a first year teacher. (W5-AN/Mar 2006)

As was noted earlier, Angela’s frustrations were significant, and knowing the context of her situation helps to explain why it was so important to her that she have a safe space for her to share those frustrations. It is also important to note that in Angela’s discussion group, the teachers she regularly met with were not teachers from her curricular department, although they were teachers from her building. She describes the relationship she had with them in the following way:

The small group discussions helped in the sense of just comfort level… I felt that I was able to develop, you know, somewhat of a bond, even though I don’t see these teachers on a day-to-day basis. It allowed me to feel connected…and that makes it more comfortable to share any challenges that you’re facing, and then being able to offer someone any suggestions… just having that comfort level. (I1-AN/Mar 14, 2006)

Since these teachers were not colleagues that she saw on a daily basis she may have more readily opened up and shared with them without worrying about the
conversation finding its way into her work with her curriculum department or her grade level colleagues. Instead, she could share her anxieties, receive some reassurance from others, and have the comfort level that the information she shared would not go outside the bounds of her group.

While a majority of the first year elementary and middle school teachers interviewed about discussion groups spoke of the need to get reassurance that they were not alone in facing their first year challenges, that pattern was not found in the data from the high school induction teachers. One explanation that may partially account for that may be that there were only two first year teachers and one first year psychologist among the eight high school staff members in the induction class. Reflective writings were turned in for all three of the teachers and I had interviewed one of them, however, they contained no references to this theme. In addition, although all of the high school teachers commented positively on the small discussion groups, none of them expressed a need to receive reassurance from their group that they were not alone in facing the challenges of their teaching. That is not to say that some of them may not have felt that way, but there was no data to confirm that from any teachers or staff members that worked exclusively at the high school.

Data from the grounded survey confirmed that a majority of teachers from all buildings and experience levels valued the small discussion groups. Thirty-two of the 33 survey respondents (97%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The small group discussions have been helpful.” This confirmed the findings that emerged from the reflective writings, responses, and interviews.
One experienced middle school teacher indicated that the small discussion groups had not been helpful. While he shared that small group discussions can be very beneficial, he emphasized that they were not especially helpful to him in the context of this teacher induction class. Data from his reflective writing and interviews, shared later in this chapter, provide many insights regarding his individual experience.

Benefits of My Participation in the Learning Community

While I have known from the beginning of my study that my role would have a significant impact, I was interested to learn more about how my presence and participation in the study had influenced the teachers’ lived experiences. I recognize that some of the participants would not necessarily feel comfortable volunteering information regarding the impact of my role and therefore the picture I am able to piece together is necessarily understood to be partial and perceptival. My participation in the study was referenced by many of the teachers throughout the study in their writing, their responses and their interviews. While understanding that this picture will necessarily present only glimpses of their perceptions, this theme was prevalent throughout the study and is important to address.

The importance of my role first emerged in the teachers’ responses to my reflections. For example, in the first set of responses, two teachers commented on the fact that I was also reflecting on my work with them and writing to the teachers as part of the course. In my reflection I had written:

Just as we are asking you to consider how you can be reflective in your practice with students, we are trying to be reflective in framing our work with you in this course. In my own personal reflections for this course, I hope to share some of my learning as I “think back on what I have seen and heard” from my work with you in this class. (W1-MP/ Oct 2005)
In response to that, Marlene, a veteran educator from the K-1 building said, “A great way to model desired behavior!” (R1-MR/Oct, 2006) and Jeffrey, an experienced high school teacher, shared similar thoughts when he wrote, “Always good to see a teacher practicing what she preaches” (R1-JE/Oct, 2006). In the second and third set of responses the teachers increasingly commented on my role in the reflective writing process and shared more personal comments that were directed towards me. For example, Rachel, a first year teacher from the 2-5 building shared, “Thank you for taking the time to read all of our reflections and plan classes according to our needs! It’s nice to know you care!” (R2-RA/Dec, 2006) Her colleague, Sara, shared similar sentiments when she said, “I like that as an administrator you care about what your new teachers are thinking and feeling” (R3-SK/Jan 2006). It was through these responses that the importance of my involvement in the study emerged. This pattern was increasingly present throughout the responses, as was shown in the third set of responses where fifteen of the teachers made some kind of positive comment regarding my role in the reflective writing and responding process.

The teachers also shared that my attempt to make this a joint venture, by asking for their input and attempting to use it to meet their needs, was seen as beneficial. Although not entirely successful, the attempt was often recognized and appreciated, as demonstrated in this excerpt from a reflection by Sara, a first-year teacher in the 2-5 building:

You said in your (my) reflection that, “...it has been my hope that we could collaboratively work together in this course to create a learning community where we could share and reflect on the problems of our practice.” I think you and the lead mentors have achieved this goal. (W5-SA/Mar 2006)
Many of the teachers shared Sara’s view that even if the course didn’t meet everyone’s needs, the collaborative element of the class, and my investment in that effort, was a successful component of the course. Even those who shared that some of the components had not worked especially well for them still seemed to have a positive view of my participation in the course. One interpretation of these data is that the teachers saw this induction class study as a learning experience for everyone, including me. Therefore, even when things didn’t closely meet their needs they were able to view it as a learning experience and appreciate the fact that they could offer input that would be helpful to other future induction teachers. In a sense, they appeared to be able to look past the things that didn’t work well, to forgive those in a sense, because of their high level of appreciation for my involvement in the process, and the district’s commitment to trying to shape the program to meet their needs.

As part of the final interview process, I more closely examined the impact that my involvement had on the participants from my own building. A majority of those teachers also shared that they felt my involvement with the course was beneficial. The teachers I interviewed shared that they appreciated the additional contact with me, whether that had been through the writing process, interviews, class meetings, or additional conversations we had had as a result of those strategies. In my final interview with Kathleen, we talked about the reflection process. At that time she explained how she saw my role in the course and expanded more on the relationship that we had developed in this exchange:

KT: You know I could just jot down things that were happening…which was usually a lot, but I would always get a response from you…which was very helpful.
Do you think it was…would a response from anyone be helpful? Or was it somehow different because we worked together? Do you know what I mean?

Yes, because you’re my principal.

How much of it is because I’m your principal or someone you know versus just the person in the class that asked you to do that?

…I think that knowing the person’s background makes things…makes you view it differently. Like, I had respect for you as a professional…you’re my building principal…I work with you often…I talk with you often…I know that you’re here to support us and…you know…those kind of things…so I really value your opinion…

And so for you it was helpful that it was me? As opposed to someone else?

I think so.

(later in the same conversation)

…I think having a more personal relationship…you know, because I…especially at the beginning of the year, would talk to you a lot more and would share things outside of school…that it was almost…I don’t know…kind of like a trusted friend. (I2-KT/Jun 8, 2006)

In Kathleen’s case, our relationship was a positive factor that helped her to gain more from the course. In addition, she believed that our interactions for the course, in terms of the reflective writing, the responses, and the interviews, served as another form of communication that strengthened the relationship between us. While that may have been true for Kathleen, it is not clear whether other teachers in my building had that experience. As a result of the course, Kathleen had more interviews and meetings with me than most of the other middle school induction teachers, which may explain why she felt the way she did. While no other teachers shared quite the same sentiments, at least one other teacher from my building, Katie, shared that she felt the writing had opened a
line of communication between us and had helped her get to know me better (see previous section). Since Katie shared that she felt that was one of the best things about the course that suggests that she also saw my role in the course as having a positive impact upon her experience as well. It is not clear if any of the other middle school teachers shared those feelings.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Challenges

Although a majority of the teachers shared that the induction course had been helpful to them, they also felt that there were challenges they faced as they participated in the learning community. Those challenges fell into four different categories which will be discussed in this section: demands on the teachers’ time, differing needs of the participants, the limited time the class met, and the impact of my role on the participants. This section answers the following research question:

3. What do participants perceive are the challenges of their participation in this learning community?

Demands on the Teachers’ Time

Many of the induction teachers struggled with the many demands on their time. They stated that they were often tired and were sometimes overwhelmed with all they had to do. This was especially true at the beginning of the year when several of the new teachers reported that they often worked late into the night or worked long days on weekends. First year teachers reported that they had many issues with organization and time management, and often had so many different tasks to do that they had difficulty figuring out where to start. Some of them remarked that they didn’t feel like they were doing anything well and weren’t sure how to prioritize what they needed to do. This can
be seen in the comments of Katie, a first year teacher in the K-1 building who shared these thoughts, “…it was very overwhelming to think well, what do I do first and where do I go next and…I mean I really didn’t know where to go first and where to start.” (I1-KT/Feb 15, 2006).

Besides organizing their classroom, new teachers struggled with classroom management as well as issues with curriculum. They also struggled through the process of prioritizing tasks and getting everything done. This can be clearly seen in Angela’s first reflection when she wrote:

…Teaching brings new meaning to the word multitasking [italics in original]. Of all the challenges I am facing as a first year teacher, making sure I am keeping up with all my “teacher responsibilities” seems to be the most overwhelming. I used to feel that being organized and efficient were some of my greatest strengths…As a first year teacher I feel about as organized and efficient as the very sixth graders that I am helping to develop their own organization abilities. I also feel frustrated because things seem to take me about twice as long as I would expect them to take.

I think that part of the challenge as a first year teacher is figuring out a routine, a system that works for me. I am working on establishing my own routine and learning how to prioritize when to do what. At times I get so overwhelmed because I am trying to do a little bit of everything so that I can keep up with my responsibilities: grading/updating grade logs, tracking missing homework, updating absent students, keeping up with parent communication, staying on top of e-mail, collaborating with colleagues, being prepared for team/staff meeting, learning curriculum objectives, determining the sequencing/pacing of curriculum, planning (what am I going to teach, what strategies am I going to use to do it, and how to plan to differentiate for different levels of ability among the students). I feel caught in a whirlwind of tasks and sometimes it’s like I forget to breathe; and I wonder…did I get everything? (W1AG/Oct 2005).

While colleagues were often willing to talk to them or help them, new teachers reported it was hard to find the time for those conversations, and when they did it sometimes put them even farther behind. Even some of the experienced teachers remarked that figuring out how things worked in their building and attending to the many
tasks that were required outside of teaching were very time consuming and made it a struggle to stay on top of things. As a result, many of the induction teachers struggled with completing the writing assignments. The reflective writings were sometimes referred to as “cumbersome” (W5-LN/Mar 2006), or “annoying” (W5-JM/Mar 2006) and many of the teachers interviewed admitted that the writing assignments were put off until the last minute. For example, Bob, a first year middle school teacher, shared a typical comment when he said, “It’s something you can kind of forget about…and then last minute you realize, oh boy, I need to write a reflection paper.” (I1-BO/Mar 6, 2006).

At least nine of the 38 teachers experienced some kind of struggle with the reflective writing, and the data from interviews, reflections, responses, and the grounded survey suggests that the number may be even higher than that. Over half of the teachers who mentioned some sort of struggle with the writing indicated that it was difficult to find the time to do it. Five of those teachers were new teachers like Angela, who indicated that they were often overwhelmed with all the responsibilities of teaching and viewed the writing as one more thing in a long list of things that they needed to do. This view was well illustrated by Patti, a K-1 teacher, who spoke about the reflective writings in her interview, and shared these initial thoughts about the assignment, “Well, when I first started I was like oh (sigh)…I’ve gotta write these stupid essays… Like, on top of everything else how am I gonna do that?” (I1-PA/Feb 9, 2006)

For these reasons, a majority of teachers reported that even though they saw the benefits of writing reflections, they tended to be written at the last minute. That feeling was shared by some of the teachers in all buildings and at all experience levels. Emma, a
middle school teacher with several previous years of experience described her struggle in this way:

Sometimes I would feel overwhelmed with the reflections, but that was my fault because I try to do too much and too, I’m a bit of a procrastinator. There was plenty of time given to complete them. Writing them really forced me to sit down and put my thoughts to paper. Yet another problem I have. I think about so many things and my mind goes ninety miles a minute and I have a hard time focusing on one thing. Sometimes I work better when I have a particular topic I have to focus on. (W5-EM/Apr, 2006)

For many of the teachers, writing the reflections at the last minute was also linked to the additional problem of not being able to decide what to write about. Although the teachers had requested an open format for reflections early in the year and had wanted to be able to write about what was most relevant to them, sometimes they had difficulty getting started. As a result, the teachers sometimes felt that the reflections did not represent their best effort. Those feelings were clearly articulated by William, an experienced middle school teacher, who described the process in this way:

…my hardest thing has been sitting down…I find myself the day before, or the day of, trying to write a reflection. So, I’m not giving you my best writing, so that is a problem I see, and I know other people that are kind of in that same situation. So, it’s not having the intended effect… (I1-WM/Mar 10, 2006)

The reflective writing process was difficult for many of the teachers, both in terms of the time it took, and the fact that the teachers had to determine what challenge or problem from their practice they wanted to write about. Although all teachers did turn in all reflections, each time they were due there were generally several that were not turned in on time. Most of the time those teachers turned in the reflections after a gentle reminder or two, except for one teacher who did not turn in her second reflection at all and ended up resigning her position midyear. Although her resignation was likely not due
to the class or its requirements, her situation is a reminder that many teachers find their first year to be very stressful and may choose not to continue in the profession if the work is too demanding.

One possible reason that teachers found the task to be challenging is that the process itself requires teachers to think critically about their work. When teachers are in their induction year there are many demands on their time. Finding the time to critically reflect on the work of teaching can be stressful in itself, and then being asked to identify and wrestle with a specific challenge takes even more time and effort. The question that arises from these data is whether the teachers believed that the learning that resulted from the reflective writing process was worth the time and effort it took. When I asked that question in interviews teachers shared that they believed the reflective writing component should be continued in the future, because they felt that without it the induction teachers might not be able to find the time to reflect (see earlier section). That is supported by these comments made by Annie, an experienced staff member from the K-1 building: “Reflection is really needed and without this class I’m not sure how much I’d be doing on my own” (R3-AI/Jan 2006).

Although the teachers had indicated early in the year that they would like to get feedback from a colleague, it appeared that the many demands on their time had a negative impact on their ability to take the time to provide that feedback. For example, William indicated that he would have liked to get some feedback from others but had never received any. He indicated that no one had ever offered him their reflection, and while he had offered his to others he had never heard back from anyone with whom he
had traded. Therefore, the process did not work for him at all, and he never received the benefit of receiving feedback from a colleague. William indicated in an interview that he believed the other teacher hadn’t seen it as a priority and therefore did not choose to take the time to write a response. Another possible explanation might be that since William had missed the first class where the initial exchange happened, other class members may have already established trading partners when he joined the class.

Another middle school teacher, Angela, stated that her group tended to talk about what they had written in their reflections, so the responses from her colleagues were not really helpful. She stated that she rarely went back and read them and explained it this way:

…I didn’t find a lot of benefits from having other people responding or vice versa…just because when we’re in the class, we already had the discussion. Most of us…what we needed to talk about was what we wrote about. So having the discussion in the class, it seemed almost redundant to go back and comment. (I1-AG/Mar 14, 2006)

Another issue mentioned by high school participants was that the responses weren’t always helpful because the feedback was often very limited. Barbara stated in her interview that the high school teachers had taken part in the exchange process; however, she indicated that she did not find the process to be especially helpful because the feedback she received was not substantive in nature. She noted that when she did receive responses they tended to be brief and said the teachers would often “do the smiley face thing” (I1-BA/Mar 10, 2006).

In summary, the majority of teachers shared that when they traded their reflections with a colleague they often did not receive substantive feedback. In other
cases, some teachers either forgot to trade papers or traded them and did not receive any feedback at all. When asked in interviews why they believed that was the case, two teachers indicated that they believed time was the issue.

_Differing Needs of the Participants_

Another theme that was woven through all sources of data was that there were differences between the needs of first year induction teachers and their more experienced colleagues. There were also differences between individual teachers within those groups. Each induction teacher is a unique individual with very different life experiences and very specific needs; therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet everyone’s needs. This can be clearly seen by examining the data regarding small discussion groups.

One of the most significant findings of the study was that even though induction teachers wanted to have the opportunity to meet and talk with each other about the problems of their practice, there is a significant difference between what first-year teachers and experienced teachers want and need to talk about. This is clearly demonstrated in Marlene’s comments from her final reflection, where she wrote about her own experience and made some suggestions for the future improvement of the class:

Finally, I realize that I am a “strange bird” in the fact that my needs are not similar to those of the majority of the staff in this class. For those of us who are not brand new to the field of education, perhaps some breakout time could be allotted for brand new staff to meet while us “veteran” educators who are new to the district could break off into small discussion groups. Fortunately, I was able to obtain feedback and discuss similar areas of need with Annie, but I am sure that there were others of which I was unaware that could have broadened our discussions. (W5-MR/Mar 2006)

These comments can be better understood by examining the process that was used to implement small discussion groups. Early in the year when that component emerged
and was initiated, the teachers expressed an interest in being able to form their own groups. Although they always had the option of changing groups, the teachers typically joined other staff members from their buildings and did not venture outside of that group. While many of them stated in their responses to my reflections that they enjoyed meeting with their building groups, as time went on those groups did not always meet the needs of all of the group’s members. This appeared to be due to the composition of the groups.

Every building had at least some first and second year teachers, and those teachers typically found the groupings by building worked well for them. The beginning teachers wrote that they enjoyed having the experienced teachers in their group and appreciated getting feedback and suggestions from them. Those discussions, however, did not necessarily offer the same benefit to the veteran staff members. The experienced teachers shared ideas and contributed to the discussions; however, they typically did not have much opportunity to discuss their own areas of concern.

The experienced teachers expressed a similar issue concerning the class discussion topics and structured small group activities. Since over half of the induction teachers were first or second year teachers the responses from the less experienced teachers were typically the ones that had the most influence in shaping the course. While the process worked well for many of those teachers, as the year went on many of our more experienced teachers in the class suggested that quite often it would have been more helpful if some alternative choices had been available to them.

This theme did not emerge until mid-year and became much more prevalent in the teachers’ later writing, which suggests that during the first two or three classes this may
have been less of a concern as everyone in the class was adjusting to their new positions and getting to know each other. By mid-year, however, several of the teachers commented on this topic and related it to their class experiences. Edward, a first year teacher, shared the following in his response:

I do think that a lot of the class seems to be geared towards the less experienced teachers. While this is great for me—especially when I get to hear some ideas from more experienced teachers—it does seem that it might not be as helpful to the more experienced teachers. (R3-ED/Jan 2006)

As the year went on the experienced teachers shared some suggestions for how we could improve that in the future. Katie offered one approach by suggesting that we change the structure of the classes to provide more choices. She wrote the following:

…break it into grade level (maybe all elementary teachers meet and all MS/HS teachers meet). Also, from there, possibly allow for teachers to pick from a couple of different topic discussions (have them pick whichever one is more beneficial to them personally). So tell the teachers ahead of time the topics that are going to be discussed and let us choose which discussion we wanted to attend (ex: differentiation and/or classroom management). There were some classes that I felt like I already knew most of the things that were discussed (the topic was time/classroom management). I definitely would have needed that my first year teaching, but not really in my 6th year of teaching. (W5-KM/Mar 2006)

Three out of five experienced teachers from the middle school shared similar experiences and indicated that their group discussions typically focused on issues that were important to first or second year teachers. While all three of them indicated that they had contributed to those discussions, they also suggested that we could improve the program for more experienced induction teachers by offering choices.

William, an experienced middle school teacher, wrote, “I deeply appreciate and welcome the opportunity to meet with fellow teachers and discuss relevant topics related to teaching” (W5-WM/Mar 2006). However, he was also very open in sharing that as an
experienced teacher he felt he did not benefit from the way the discussion groups were structured. In his final reflection he offered this suggestion:

…I think that the class should account for where each teacher is, in terms of teaching experience, and provide groupings based on such. I think that making groups based on experience would also help to create situations where learning will continue beyond the first year. I believe that people identify with and seek out people like themselves, and that teachers identify most with others going through a similar experience. Along these lines, I also think groupings should be made based on teaching location, i.e. elementary, middle, and high school, due to the inherent shared experiences here. (W5-WM/Mar 2006)

William’s words can be better understood by looking more closely at the context of his lived experience. After missing the first two classes due to medical situations within his family William attended the next class and joined a group that primarily consisted of middle school art and music teachers. Many of those teachers were also first-year teachers. Therefore, his group varied both in experience level and teaching content, so the topics suggested that were of interest to them were not necessarily relevant for him. William described one of those situations in his interview, saying:

…in my experience in the conversation I’ve had, in the conversation I saw happen with the art teachers…it was the same. They all said, let’s talk about management…and here if it wasn’t relevant to me, that’s still the area, that’s the direction they wanted to go, but that’s what they needed. And so, that was good, you know…(I1-WM/Mar 10, 2006)

William went on to talk about this topic at length, and described his experiences with the group discussions, which were similar to those of some of his colleagues. In our interview, however, I asked him to explain why he thought the experienced teachers did not speak up to suggest a topic that would be of higher interest to them. Overall, he explained, when the first-year teachers in the groups generally suggested discussing first-year kinds of issues, like classroom management, the experienced teachers recognized
that those issues were clearly important to the beginning teachers, so they typically did not speak up to suggest a different topic of discussion that they might have found to be more interesting or meaningful.

While William did not provide any further explanation, their hesitation to change the course of the group discussion can be interpreted in different ways. One possible explanation is that there were typically more first-year teachers in each group than veteran teachers. Therefore, when the group needed to come to a consensus they simply went with the majority. Another interpretation might be that the veteran teachers recognized that first year teachers needed and often requested assistance in working through specific challenges in their daily practice. Therefore, when those teachers suggested topics for discussion, the experienced teachers saw those as important and prioritized the requests of the first year teachers to make sure they got the help they needed. This would suggest that the veterans in the group served as unofficial mentors and leaders, and took very seriously the needs of their less experienced colleagues.

The experienced elementary and middle school teachers who shared these concerns were supportive of the small discussion group format. All but one of them, however, suggested or indicated that implementing a grouping strategy that was more closely tied to experience as well as building or grade levels at least some of the time would have definitely been advantageous to them. While they enjoyed talking with their less experienced colleagues and believed it helped them to get to know them better, they all indicated that they would have also appreciated opportunities to meet with other experienced colleagues to allow them to discuss topics that were more relevant to them.
Topics that the more experienced teachers suggested that they would have liked to discuss included grading, assessment, differentiation, and intervention assistance teams.

The data indicated that by structuring the class to meet the needs of the majority we sometimes did not meet the needs of the minority. This pattern was prevalent among experienced teachers at the elementary and middle school levels; however, there were no data found to either confirm or disconfirm whether teachers at the high school shared a similar experience. In addition, none of the high school teachers indicated that they would have benefited from a different structuring or use of the small discussion groups.

For all of the reasons mentioned, some of the teachers believed that the response process had not been effective in shaping the class to meet their needs. This was also confirmed on the grounded survey where only 24 of the 33 survey respondents (73%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Responding to the facilitator’s reflections helped shape the class to meet my needs.” Six other teachers responded that they were not sure if it had helped to meet their needs and three teachers disagreed with the statement. This data represented a far greater degree of disagreement than what had been indicated for other survey questions.

*Limited Time the Class Met*

A third challenge that emerged from the data was that there were limits to the course’s effectiveness because the class met infrequently. The class only met seven times over the course of the school year, and those meetings were a month apart. Therefore, all benefits of the class were tempered by the lack of continuity in between classes. This became apparent across the year in a variety of ways. For example, if a teacher was
absent from a meeting and did not turn in a reflection, I often had to contact them to ask for their assignments. When those assignments trailed in, especially right before the holiday break, it was clear that the induction class (and its assignments) were not foremost on the teachers’ minds when the class was not in session.

During the interviews the time issue was referenced by several of the teachers. They sometimes shared that while the class provided them with a valuable opportunity to talk with their peers, in between classes they didn’t always have the opportunity to have much continued contact with those colleagues. While some of them did see their peers on a regular basis, others did not see them except in the class. During Kathleen’s interview, she compared the induction class to another mentoring class she took this year and said, “and that (the mentoring class) was really helpful…it was more work, more meeting times, but I felt there was more of a continuation…more of a continuum there” (I2-KT/Jun 8, 2006)

Several of the class participants indicated that they felt it would have been helpful to have some additional opportunities to get together with their peers in between classes, and some of them suggested it would be enjoyable if those could be set up as informal gatherings in more social settings. For example, Kathleen, a first year teacher, shared her thoughts about the time limitations of the class and said, “…when you think about it…it’s almost like a short amount of time to be meeting…for some of the things that new teachers are working through” (I2-KT/Jun 8, 2006). She continued by indicating that we should, “…maybe just add a few more meetings to the overall schedule. Maybe make some of them more informal…like a dinner.”
This pattern was found among teachers of all buildings and experience levels, and was especially prevalent in the reflections from the K-1 teachers. Due to a schedule conflict those teachers had met for a more informal social gathering for their January meeting at one of the mentor teacher’s homes. The meeting was structured more as a social gathering and included the induction teachers, their mentors, and their principal. During that meeting the group had pizza, socialized, and then talked informally about classroom management, the class topic for the month. It was interesting to note that every K-1 teacher who commented on that meeting said that they enjoyed that meeting more than any other induction class, and suggested that we provide more of those types of opportunities for future induction classes. This can be seen in Maggie’s final reflection where she shared the following:

One of my favorite meetings was when the K-1 first year teachers had the opportunity to meet on an informal basis at (one of the mentor’s) home along with their mentors. I thought this meeting had great purpose and I left with a better assurance and with some new ideas. One thing that made this meeting stand apart from the others was the fact that we gathered at a home as opposed to a classroom. It was a very comfortable and relaxed atmosphere and a great change of pace. I enjoyed eating pizza and munchies as we casually discussed classroom management and time management. All first year teachers shared techniques and classroom routines that seemed to be proving successful within their classrooms…I found this meeting to be the most interesting and relevant. I enjoyed meeting with my grade-level and K-1 building peers. Even though we all work within the same building we do not have the opportunity to sit down and share so openly. I found this to be a very rewarding experience! (W5-MK/Mar 2006)

Impact of My Role on the Participants

While many of the teachers shared positive comments that they appreciated my involvement in the course (see previous section), at least some of the teachers also found the process to be somewhat more difficult because they knew that I would be the
audience for their writing. Part of that may have resulted from the fact that I was an administrator and someone they didn’t know very well. Most of the teachers seemed to quickly make the adjustment and indicated that they became comfortable with the reflective writing; however, that process was more difficult for at least one of the teachers in my building, William. Although he was the only participant who shared these fears, I believe it is very possible that other teachers may have had similar concerns with the process and not been comfortable sharing them. Therefore, because those issues were so important to him and may provide important insights, I am including selected segments from his final interview that illuminate his concerns more clearly.

In his final interview, William shared that it was initially much more difficult for him to write his reflection because he was writing to me, his principal. He shared the following:

I think when I started out it took me a while to get on my feet with what I wanted to reflect on and what exactly you wanted me to talk about…and I guess there was a fear of safety…the problem is that I started out with this fear of…you don’t want to make yourself look bad I guess…and you don’t want to say you don’t know what you’re doing to someone who’s in charge of you” (I2-WM/Jun 12, 2006).

Once he had submitted his first reflection and had received my response he felt differently and explained it this way:

…with submitting one and getting feedback and seeing…I think it was huge. Part of the bonus of it was the fact that you wrote quite a bit back. So you giving the feedback, and that you took it seriously…I think part of the initial help was that you did respond so much on it. So I knew that it was serious and it was taken seriously. I really thought hard…I really wanted to find something that I really wanted feedback on  (I2-WM, Jun 12, 2006).
When describing the first response he had received William shared that, “…people value your opinion…your feedback is strong…” (I1-WM/Jun 12, 2006). At that time he indicated that he felt better about the process in some ways. He no longer felt the same fear because he could see that I took it seriously. William was therefore very interested in receiving my feedback on certain issues, but still tended to worry and over think what he should write about. Although the reasons for his difficulty had changed, his struggle was still complicated by the fact that he was writing for me. He explained it this way:

I can’t separate myself from the fact that…that you’re the one reading them…and that I’m working for you. And that’s …that’s hard for me I guess…

(a little later in the interview)

…I guess I over thought what…who I was writing to, that’s my problem. I guess if I could just put it into one phrase is that I was thinking too much that I was writing for you to read it. And so I was always trying to think of what would be something that you would want to read from me…and not necessarily what I needed individually (I2-WM/Jun 12, 2006).

Although he shared that he had reflected a great deal over the course of the year and had enjoyed our conversations, he still felt that he hadn’t benefited from the writing process in the way that he would have liked to. In light of the fact that William is a confident, experienced, and very reflective teacher, it was concerning to learn that he had so much difficulty getting past those concerns and didn’t feel that the writing process had been a meaningful way for him to reflect on his practice. Many of the less experienced teachers in my building were understandably much less confident than he was and I have to consider the fact that they may have also shared many of the same fears.
Toward the end of our interview William shared one final thought concerning the reflection process that provided some additional insight for me. In sharing his concerns about my involvement with the writing, William said that part of his struggle was that he was basing his writing on what he thought I wanted instead of what he needed. He shared some additional insights in the following exchange:

MP: …you know, I don’t want to make it more difficult…but yet, if it is a valuable process (the reflective writing)…how can I include it without people being fearful that they’re writing to me?

WM: …What I guess I’m trying to get out of it is that it’s maybe not the writing…it’s the fact that they’re reflecting. So, if you found another way to have people reflect that didn’t involve writing…great…but I can’t think of any other possible way to formally have people do it… (I2-WM/Jun 12, 2006)

While William felt the reflection was very valuable, he struggled with how we could structure the reflection process so that the teachers were reflecting based on what would be helpful to them instead of based on what they needed to do for me. He suggested that if the goal of the class is to help teachers grow as reflective practitioners, it is important to think about how we might structure those opportunities for reflection differently. While William indicated that he had learned a great deal over the course of the year, whether that was in any way influenced by the class, or occurred in spite of it, was not clear. I have to consider that my role in the class presented some challenges for William, and therefore must acknowledge that those challenges were quite likely to be present for at least some of the other class participants as well.
Impact on Future Use of Reflection Strategies

This section examines how the teachers perceive they will use reflection strategies in the future. In this section the following research question will be addressed:

4. How do the participants perceive the use of reflective strategies will impact their future use of these strategies in their teaching?

Even though many of the teachers reported that they reflected more when they wrote their reflections, few of them believe they will continue writing reflections in the future. When asked during the interviews, all but two of the first year teachers indicated that they would always reflect on their teaching, but stated that they would likely not continue to write reflections. Rachel’s answer was typical:

I don’t think I’ll sit down and type it out…but I think that I will definitely do the reflecting, you know, in my head and even…writing down small notes to remind myself that I might want to do this next time. (I1-RA/Mar 14, 2006)

Although the majority of the teachers indicated that they did not believe they would continue to write reflections on their own two of the eight teachers interviewed shared some thoughts about future writing of reflections. Barbara, a high school teacher who was one of the seven first year teachers interviewed, indicated that she regularly writes reflections on her own and would definitely continue writing them in the future. She said,

I also just got out of a highly reflective program where we were required to do tons and tons of reflections. I do it on my own. If something happens I write about it at home. I have to process…I definitely have to write to process. (I2-BA/Mar 10, 2006)

Therefore, while she may very well continue writing reflections that would not necessarily be because of anything that happened in the induction course. Another first
year teacher middle school teacher, Bob, also shared his hope that he would continue writing reflections, saying,

I think that having it [the reflective writing] kind of required has definitely helped and it’s kind of put you in the habit of doing it and…I think I’ll carry that on, hopefully, keep consistent with it, every year…I think it’s [the class has] built up that habit of actually doing that process, so hopefully I’ll continue to do that” (I1-BO/Mar 6, 2006).

While only two teachers indicated that they would write reflections in the future, a majority of teachers indicated that they would continue to reflect on their own teaching in an effort to improve their practice. In addition, teachers also indicated that they would continue to look for other opportunities to talk with other teachers about their practice as they perceived those conversations enhanced their reflection and contributed to their learning (see previous section).
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Induction programs have become valued and accepted practices (Kelley, 2004; Wayne et al, 2005) as a means of providing newly hired teachers with emotional support (Feimer-Nemser, 2003) and helping them to get to know others, become comfortable in their roles, and learn about resources that are available in their districts (Kelley, 2004). Traditionally, induction programs have often been framed with those goals as the focus and have been structured to provide teachers with information on district policies and procedures and additional support that is designed to get them through their first year. While those things are important, recent research suggests that those goals fall far short of providing teachers the assistance they need to become reflective practitioners in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Quality induction programs go beyond helping teachers survive their first year and instead focus on helping teachers learn (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). With teacher learning as the goal, high quality induction programs also go beyond a one-shot orientation or a short-term approach and provide support throughout the year (McCann et al, 2005). With that understanding, induction programs need to be viewed as an important form of professional development and planned according to what we know about how teachers learn (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).
In recent years educators have recognized the need for professional development to involve teachers in ongoing work that is directly tied to their own practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Little, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Miller, 1992). Quality professional development engages teachers in ongoing thoughtful conversations about teaching and learning, and those conversations occur in communities of practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The induction class that provided the setting for this study was an attempt to create one such community of practice.

Focus of the Research

The induction class had a focus on guided reflection and was structured in alignment with Wenger’s (1998) model of a learning community. That model views a learning community as a community of practice that has learning as its core and central focus. A community of practice is also defined as having three critical components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Using those criteria, the class learning community was set up with a goal of involving all participants in the process of learning to be reflective practitioners. With that goal in mind, changes were implemented in the existing program. In an effort to create mutual engagement, teachers were provided with the opportunity to help shape the class by sharing their preferences for class format and discussion topics. The class was also structured as a joint enterprise as the facilitators and teachers used a collective process of negotiation to make decisions for the course throughout the school year. Through this process both teachers and facilitators were involved in negotiating meaning to develop a shared repertoire for the class.
The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the experiences of teachers as they begin their work in a new district and participate in the learning community of a teacher induction class. The study specifically sought to answer these questions:

1. Which components of the induction class were perceived by the teachers as helpful during their induction year?

2. What do participants perceive are the benefits of their participation in this learning community that is focused on reflection?

3. What do participants perceive are the challenges of their participation in this learning community?

4. How do the participants perceive the use of reflective strategies will impact their future use of these strategies in their teaching?

In the next section, the major findings for each of the focus research questions will be stated and summarized. Following that, limitations of the study will be described, and the implications of the findings will be addressed.

Summary of Findings for Research Questions 1 & 2

The first research question examined the induction teachers’ perceptions regarding the components of the class they perceived were helpful during their induction year, and the second addressed the benefits teachers perceived they gained as part of the learning community. Findings from these two questions will be addressed together. Some of the findings relative to these questions were consistent with those in the literature; however, this study also resulted in some additional insight.

Benefits of Reflective Writing

Reflective writing can be used as an effective tool in encouraging reflective practice (Boud, 2001; Carter, 1998; Valli, 1997) and consistent with other research
(Giovannelli, 2003; Griffin, 2003; Bain et al, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Gipe & Richards, 1992) teachers in this study also indicated that the journal writing process helped them reflect on their practice. Teachers agreed that reflection is an important component of effective teaching. A majority of the teachers indicated that the writing process helped ensure that they spent time reflecting on their teaching, which contributed to their learning. In addition, teachers indicated that the reflective writing provided a safe place where they could vent about concerns, which often led to dialogue and resolution.

Previous studies have indicated that journal writing can be an important means of identifying teachers’ concerns (Uline et al, 2004), which was also found to be the case in this study. Several of the first year teachers in this study shared that they saw the writing as a place where they could vent some of their frustrations when they were overwhelmed or were dealing with difficult issues. Some of the teachers in the middle school, where I was the principal, used the writing as an opportunity to initiate a dialogue with me about issues they were working through. In addition, one teacher in my building indicated that she felt the best part of the course was the fact that the writing had opened up a line of communication that helped her to get me know me better.

Teachers have identified personalized feedback and relationships with instructors as important benefits from reflective writing (Bain et al, 2002; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Teachers from all buildings and all experience levels in the present study shared that the personalized responses provided on the reflections were helpful to them. Teachers appreciated feedback on their reflections that provided new ideas for how they might
address specific concerns, which was also consistent with other research (Bain et al, 2002).

Benefits of Teachers’ Responses to Teachers’ Reflective Writing

In a previous study (Tillman, 2003), teachers’ responses from another teacher were shown to facilitate communication and provide additional feedback and assistance to induction teachers; however, that was not the case in this study. A majority of the teachers in the present study indicated that receiving responses from their colleagues was not especially helpful, because the teachers did not give that work a high priority due to other demands on their time (see next section).

Benefits of Teachers’ Responses to My Reflective Writing

Quality professional development allows teachers a voice to help set the purposes and priorities of the work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992), which allows them to take ownership in the process. Attempts at teacher development will have little chance of success if they do not meet the needs of the teachers (Hargreaves, 1992); therefore, for induction programs to be useful they must be planned to meet the specific needs of the teachers (Grant & Zeichner, 1981). Both first-year teachers and experienced veterans in the present study perceived that having input into the decision-making process had been a helpful component of the course.

A majority of the teachers perceived that it was beneficial that the course was structured as a collaborative venture. They appreciated having the opportunity to share their input through writing, interviews, and discussions so that the class could be shaped according to their needs. They also shared that it meant a lot to them that we were
interested in learning how we could make the course more meaningful in an effort to improve the class for the district’s future teachers. They valued the fact that we asked for their ideas, suggestions, and feedback and believed that was evidence that we cared about them both personally and professionally.

While the response process was clearly valued by the induction teachers, the end result was not entirely successful in meeting the needs of all class participants. A majority of beginning teachers perceived that the response process was effective in helping shape the class to meet their needs; however, that was not the case for many of the experienced teachers in the class (see later section on challenges). This suggests that just having the process did not ensure that everyone’s needs were met.

Benefits of Small Group Discussions

Teachers develop a sense of trust and interest in each other’s work when reflection is seen as a community activity (Eaker et al, 1992). While the literature included for this study on the use of reflective discussion groups for induction was limited (Cady, 2005; Carver, 2004; Glazer et al, 2004), the results of those studies indicated that the use of those groups can provide a supportive environment for teacher reflection on classroom events and challenges. Overwhelmingly, the induction teachers in this study perceived that the small discussions groups was the most helpful component of the class. As is found in much of the recent literature on beginning teachers (Gilbert, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002), induction (Cady, 1998), and professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), teachers want the opportunity to talk with their colleagues about their daily practice. Collaboration with colleagues is not only desired, it is essential for
personal learning (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) and increases the likelihood that teachers will be successfully reflective (Glazer et al, 2004). As was evident in the present study, teachers working in community provide intellectual stimulation as well as social and emotional support as they reflect on their practice (Eaker et al, 1992).

Quality professional development also takes place when teachers are engaged in serious, ongoing conversations about their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Teachers in this study agreed that the most valuable use of their time was to talk with other teachers about the problems and challenges they faced in their teaching. They regularly requested that time and reported that it was the most important component of the course and needed to be included in future induction classes. This suggests that induction programs need to provide teachers with structured opportunities to engage in conversations with their peers about their teaching.

Teachers perceived there were many benefits to their participation in the discussion groups. Collaborative reflection can be a powerful tool for professional growth (Glazer et al, 2004), and teachers in the present study noted that when their groups chose to discuss their reflection papers, the conversation with their colleagues helped to enhance their reflection and bring it to a new level. As their colleagues offered new perspectives, the teachers revisited those areas of concern and were challenged to consider new possibilities and alternatives. The give and take of the group’s conversation helped the teachers learn by expanding their thinking in new directions while providing an additional layer of support. Consistent with the literature supporting this study (Glazer
et al, 2004) collaborative reflection was able to provide the participants with new knowledge as well as practical solutions to real life problems.

New teachers benefit from a variety of opportunities to work with other teachers (Gilbert, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002). Teachers may learn the most when they learn from other teachers, particularly those colleagues in their own schools (Hargreaves, 1992). Teachers in the present study perceived that the discussion groups enhanced their reflection and also described additional benefits associated with their participation in those groups. Those benefits included building relationships and trust with their colleagues, gaining new perspectives, and learning through their interactions with others. In addition, first-year teachers appreciated the reassurance they gained from other teachers that they were not alone in the challenges they faced. Beginning teachers also appreciated the opportunity to new ideas and advice from their peers and more experienced colleagues.

A majority of teachers also perceived that my participation in the learning community was beneficial to them. Many of the teachers shared the view that even if the course didn’t meet everyone’s needs, the collaborative element of the class, and my investment in that effort, was a successful component of the course. They had a high level of appreciation for my involvement in the induction program, and shared that they appreciated the additional contact with they had with me through their participation in the writing process, responses, interviews, class meetings, and conversations we had as a result of the course.
Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

Although the participants perceived there were benefits of the course, some of the most significant findings of the study were the result of examining the obstacles and challenges that the teachers faced as participants in the induction learning community. Those challenges fell into four different areas: demands on the teachers’ time, differing needs of the participants, the limited time that the class met, and the impact of my role on the participants.

Demands on the Teachers’ Time

New teachers are often overwhelmed with meeting the challenging demands that are made on their time (McCann et al, 2005; Millinger, 2004) and that was also true of the induction teachers in this class. This was especially true for beginning teachers; however, experienced teachers shared many of those same feelings. Teachers felt that their many job responsibilities both inside and outside of the classroom made it very difficult for them to find the time to write reflections. As a result, they were often written at the last minute and did not necessarily reflect the teachers’ best effort.

Teachers also indicated that the many demands on their time also adversely affected their ability to provide their colleagues with substantive feedback on their reflections. The induction teachers indicated that the feedback they received from their peers was typically not substantive in nature, and in some situations none was given at all. While a few of the teachers indicated that they did appreciate getting responses from their colleagues and enjoyed reading what was written, a larger majority of the teachers felt that the process was not especially helpful to them because of the limited nature of
the feedback. Other teachers noted that they had discussed the reflections in their small
groups, so they felt that any feedback provided was redundant.

Differing Needs of the Participants

Beginning teachers have very different needs than their more experienced peers
(Feiman-Nemser, 2001, Grant & Zeichner, 1981) and that was also the case in the present
study. Teachers in this study formed building-based groups. Small group discussions
typically centered around the interests of the beginning teachers because they were the
majority. Experienced teachers suggested that they would have also benefited from
having opportunities to meet with other experienced teachers so that they could discuss
topics that were aligned with their needs and interests.

The differing needs of the class participants also affected the selection of focus
topics for class discussion and structured group activities. Consistent with the literature
supporting this study (McCann et al, 2005) beginning teachers had many needs in the
areas of classroom management, organization and time management, relationships with
students and parents, and knowledge of curriculum and requested that the class sessions
focus on those areas. Experienced teachers requested that the class sessions focus on
topics that were more closely tied to teaching such as differentiation, assessment,
evaluation, and grading. The class sessions were usually structured around the requests of
the majority, so the class met the needs of the beginning teachers but often fell short of
meeting the needs of their experienced colleagues since alternative choices were not
offered. Several of the experienced induction teachers suggested that teachers be given
choices so that they could select the options that were best suited to their specific needs.
Limited Time that the Class Met

Quality induction programs provide support throughout the year (McCann et al, 2005). Although this class met over the course of a school year, teachers perceived that one of the drawbacks to the course was that it only met seven times. The class sessions were only scheduled once a month, which resulted in some loss of continuity. For example, this affected the teachers’ ability to build relationships because they were often not able to connect with those colleagues in between classes. Many expressed that if there had been some additional classes or informal social gatherings between classes that would have been helpful in building relationships.

The limited amount of time the class met also resulted in a lack of continuity between the discussions and topics that were dealt with from one class to the next. In addition, the class schedule had a similar impact on the written reflections because they were only written once a month so the teachers tended to write about separate, unrelated issues. Quality professional development programs provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in ongoing, serious discussions about their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Teachers in the present study perceived the discussion groups were beneficial; however, they were often not able to talk to their group members in between classes, which also resulted in a loss of continuity for those conversations.

Impact of My Role in the Learning Community

My presence in the course presented some challenges for some of the teachers. The audience for reflective writing is important (Boud, 2001), and even though the reflections were not evaluated, some of the teachers struggled with the writing
assignments because they were turning them in to me. This was especially true for some
of those teachers who worked in my building. As the person who directly supervised
them and evaluated their performance, it made it hard for at least one of the teachers in
my building to feel comfortable writing to me about issues or concerns. Therefore, they
did not necessarily choose to write their reflections on the issues that would have been
the most helpful to them, but instead wrote about safe, comfortable topics. Only one
teacher shared that he felt this way; however, it is possible that some of the other
participants may have had a similar experience.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 4

The fourth research question focuses on what reflection strategies the participants
in the induction class perceive that they will use in the future. Research has shown that
reflective writing can be beneficial in developing reflective skills (Bain et al, 2002), and
teachers perceived that was the case in the present study. While a majority of the
induction teachers found the reflective writing to be beneficial, they also noted that it was
time consuming. Most of them indicated that they would likely not write reflections on
their teaching in the future.

There were two known exceptions to this out of the eight participants who were
interviewed and both were first year teachers. One was in the habit of writing in a journal
on a regular basis and said that she would definitely continue that; the other said that he
hoped he would be able to continue the practice, but was concerned about being able to
find the time. A majority of the teachers indicated that although they did not plan to do
written reflections in the future they would definitely continue to think reflectively about
their work. In addition, the induction teachers indicated that they would continue to look for opportunities to have conversations with their colleagues and reflect on their practice as they worked toward improving their teaching.

Implications for Induction Programs

In light of what has been learned from the present study, there are several implications for induction programs: 1) induction programs need to be viewed as opportunities for professional development with a goal of helping teachers learn; 2) induction teachers need to have a voice in shaping the induction program and have the means to provide input and feedback throughout the year about what they want and need from the course; 3) reflective writing can be used to support teacher learning and reflection as part of an induction course, but for that to be successful teachers must have a trusting relationship with the reader and must receive meaningful, personalized feedback; 4) teachers may need to be provided with class time to respond to each others’ reflections if that strategy is to be effectively used to foster reflection in an induction class; 5) induction teachers want and need opportunities to talk with other teachers about their teaching in an effort to improve their practice; 6) teachers’ needs vary, so induction teachers need to be offered choices so that they can shape their own learning according to their needs and interests. In this section, each of these implications will be explained and described, along with the conditions that are important to ensure success.

Quality induction programs need to be seen as valuable opportunities for professional development and should be structured with a goal of helping teachers learn. This means that they need to be viewed as more than a support system to help new staff
survive their first year in the district. Instead, they need to be seen as a unique opportunity for educators to work collaboratively with teachers in a learning community that is focused on helping teachers improve their practice as reflective teachers. Induction teachers have many demands on their time, so structured opportunities for reflection need to be built into the induction program to ensure that teachers are engaged in reflection as part of the program.

Professional development needs to be embedded in the teachers’ daily work and teachers need to be able to have a voice in shaping those efforts. For that to happen, they should have the opportunity to share their preferences for class format and topics of discussion. They also need to be provided with the means to provide input and feedback throughout the year about what they want and need from the course so that information can be used to assess the teachers’ changing needs over time. This could be done by taking a few minutes of class time to get the teachers’ feedback and suggestions or by providing an additional communication tool such as an electronic list serve, chat room or computer program (such as Moodle) where teachers could ask questions or submit their suggestions and ideas in between classes.

Reflective writing can be an effective tool to support teacher reflection. If it is not required, however, induction teachers will likely not choose to do it on their own due to the many demands on their time. Therefore, if reflective writing is going to be used as part of a teacher induction program, it needs to be structured into the program thoughtfully to ensure that the teachers perceive that it has enough benefit to justify the time they will spend writing it. There are two important factors to consider when
structuring reflective writing within an induction program. First, induction teachers believe the feedback they receive should be personalized and substantive in nature. Facilitators should therefore spend the time to respond in meaningful ways by providing feedback that goes beyond emotional support and challenges teachers to reflect and think more deeply about alternatives or possibilities they may not have considered. Second, it is also necessary to carefully consider who the teachers’ audience is for the writing. Teachers are typically more comfortable with the process if their writing is not submitted to their direct supervisor or evaluator; therefore, it is best to have teachers submit their reflections to someone other than their immediate supervisor when that is possible. When that is not possible, the supervisor may need to spend additional time meeting with the induction teachers to help establish a more comfortable and trusting relationship with those staff members.

Induction teachers also perceive that taking the time to respond in writing to a colleague’s reflections in writing is not especially helpful. They have so many demands on their time that taking the time to write those responses to others is not seen as a high priority for their own learning. Instead, they would prefer to either be provided with the time to write the response in class, or provide that feedback in face-to-face conversations with each other. Therefore, for this component to be successfully incorporated in an induction program, teachers may need to be provided with time to read the reflections and write the responses in class.

One of the most significant findings in this study is that both beginning and experienced induction teachers want and need to talk with other teachers about their
teaching. Teachers perceive that those opportunities enhance their reflection and help them to improve their practice. They also believe that those conversations help them to build relationships with others. Induction teachers perceive that those conversations are more helpful to them if they are grouped with other teachers that share some commonalities, both in terms of what they teach (or what job responsibilities they have if they are not a teacher) and in their level of experience. In addition, induction teachers perceive that they receive more benefit from those conversations when they can have a role in determining what they will talk about.

The differences between the needs of beginning teachers and those with experience need to be taken into account when planning small group discussions. First year teachers enjoy interacting with other induction teachers, and appreciate the reassurance they receive from hearing that they are not alone in the challenges they face. However, they also believe that they benefit from conversations with experienced teachers. They want to be able to share their concerns and receive ideas from teachers who may have already dealt with those issues. They are also interested in discussing ideas about how to set up and manage the classroom, how to deal with challenging students and parents, and how to manage their time to accomplish all of the non-teaching tasks that are part of their job responsibilities. Experienced induction teachers enjoy meeting with other new staff and contribute to those discussions in a positive way; however, they are also interested in having thoughtful conversations with other veteran teachers about questions regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, grading, and intervention assistance. Induction programs can help meet the needs of both groups by
including the mentor teachers in some of the activities or by bringing in other experienced teachers to meet with induction teachers during some of the group activities or class sessions.

Since induction teachers have a wide range of needs, using their feedback to develop a single plan for all new staff will not be effective in meeting everyone’s needs. For that reason, it would be helpful to provide choices for the induction teachers so that they can participate in the discussions or activities that they feel would contribute the most to their learning. Using an approach that allows teachers to have more choices would better serve the needs of all of the participants.

For serious conversations about teaching and learning to be sustained over time, there must be ongoing communication between the participants. While induction programs that meet throughout the year can be helpful in starting those conversations and fostering teacher reflection, there can be a loss of continuity when the course meetings are spread too far apart. As was evidenced in this study, a limited number of meetings can lead to a somewhat disjointed result where the writings, responses, and discussions are somewhat helpful at the time but do not necessarily relate to previous or future experiences in the class. In addition, for those discussions to occur, teachers must also have the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with other class participants and the facilitators, which also takes time. Therefore, in a similar situation where a limited number of induction course meetings are spread out over time, class participants would benefit from having additional opportunities to interact with each other (and the class facilitators) in between classes. This would provide opportunities for the teachers to have
ongoing conversations and would also help them to build stronger relationships. In addition, those interactions would help to provide more continuity as the teachers collectively reflect on their practice. Those opportunities would not have to be limited to formal class sessions, but instead could be structured as more informal social gatherings in their buildings with the mentors and possibly other teachers or administrators from the school in attendance. This would provide additional opportunities for induction teachers to continue their discussions, share their concerns, and receive feedback before the next scheduled class meeting. In addition it would be helpful in building relationships.

Limitations

There were two limitations to this study that need to be addressed. The first is that when I selected interview participants I chose seven first-year teachers and one experienced teacher. The beginning teachers were selected to represent all four buildings and a wide range of new teacher experiences. I chose to include one experienced teacher so that I could contrast his experience with those of the new teachers. In hindsight, I now realize that I made those choices under the assumption that most of my new learning would come from the first-year teachers. As I continued to analyze my data, I realized that there were many things I was learning from experienced induction teachers as well. I have included those data in this study because I believe they have resulted in important insights; however, the fact that I only interviewed one experienced teacher, William, is a limitation to this study. As a result, it is not clear whether other experienced teachers shared his perceptions or had similar experiences.
A second limitation concerns the grounded survey. The survey was given to the teachers during the March class so that I could have the teachers fill it out during class. I made this choice because I did not want to put any additional burdens on the teachers’ time and I wanted to ensure I received survey responses from all or most of the participants. The eight first round interviews had been completed at that time, and questions for the survey were developed based on the themes that were emerging from the data at the time. While the survey information provided some very useful data, there were also new themes that emerged as a result of the final interviews that were conducted at the end of the year, and those were not addressed on the survey. Since the grounded survey needed to be administered before the final interviews, it is therefore limited to some degree.

Implications for Future Research

As educators strive to plan future induction programs that foster teacher reflection, there will need to be continued research in several areas. First, class facilitators must examine how teachers can be involved in providing ongoing and continuous feedback to the course facilitators that will help them to better shape the class to meet a wide range of teacher needs. As new ideas emerge for how that might be done, studies must examine the effectiveness of the process and whether teachers perceive it is allowing them to have an authentic and meaningful voice in planning for their own learning.

Future studies also need to examine how the teachers’ feedback can more effectively be used to offer a differentiated experience for the participants. Studies need
to investigate various ways that induction courses could be differentiated for both beginning teachers and experienced veterans. More research also needs to be done to examine the needs of adult learners in an effort to apply that knowledge to the planning of professional development opportunities and specifically induction programs.

The use of collaborative discussion groups to encourage reflection in induction teachers must also be examined in future research. There is considerable research that supports teacher learning through collaboration and conversation with colleagues about improving the work of their practice. However, this research is very sparse in the area of teacher induction. Induction teachers are typically very overwhelmed with the day-to-day work of their new positions, and further research needs to be done to learn more about how induction teachers can be involved in structured opportunities for reflection that do not add an additional burden in terms of their time outside of class. Collaborative discussion groups provide an opportunity for teachers to collectively reflect on the problems of their practice while building trusting relationships with their colleagues. More studies need to be conducted to examine how these groups can be used to enhance teacher reflection in induction programs.

In recent years educators have been moving away from one-shot orientations for teacher induction and are increasingly implementing yearlong induction programs to provide additional support for induction teachers over the first year. While those changes have been a positive step in the right direction, future studies need to examine how educators can provide increased and ongoing communication with those teachers to help connect what they are learning both within and outside of their induction course. As part
of that effort, educators need to explore additional ways that induction teachers can be provided with safe spaces to reflect on their practice, through writing, conversations with their colleagues, and possibly through electronic media. In addition, future studies would be helpful in investigating the effectiveness of possibly extending induction programs into the teachers’ second year in their positions.


APPENDIX A

INDUCTION CLASS PARTICIPANTS
**INDUCTION CLASS PARTICIPANTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction Class Participants*</th>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Building Placement(s)</th>
<th>Years of Prior Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>SK</td>
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<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>EL</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>K-1 Building</td>
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<td>Anne</td>
<td>AK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
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<td>K-1 Building &amp; 2-5 Building</td>
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<td>2-5 Building</td>
<td>1/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelli</td>
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<td>2-5 Building</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Marie</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<td>BO</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Middle School &amp; High School</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Lauren</td>
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<td>Bill</td>
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<td>Marilyn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeffrey</td>
<td>JE</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Anne</td>
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<td>High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B

### INDUCTION PROGRAM SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction Class Meetings</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Teacher Orientation</td>
<td>Monday, 8/22, 2005</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Teacher Orientation</td>
<td>Tuesday, 8/23, 2005</td>
<td>8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class #1</td>
<td>September 23, 2005</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class #2</td>
<td>October 27, 2005</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Reflection #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #3</td>
<td>December 8, 2005</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Reflection #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #4</td>
<td>January 19, 2006</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Reflection #3</td>
</tr>
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<td>K-1 Meeting</td>
<td>February 2, 2006</td>
<td>2:45 – 3:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class #5</td>
<td>February 23, 2006</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Reflection #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #6</td>
<td>March 23, 2006</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Reflection #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class #7</td>
<td>April 20, 2006</td>
<td>3:30 – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
September, 2005  Protocol # __________

Dear Teachers:

For the past three years I have worked with Pat Stewart, our district’s personnel director, and the four lead teachers because of my interest in supporting their work in the new teacher induction program. As part of my continued interest in helping to learn more about how to support our district’s new teachers, I am conducting a research study in conjunction with our 2005-2006 New Teacher Induction Class for the district. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of interactive and reciprocal reflective journal writing, large and small group class discussions, and readings about reflection in supporting our new teachers and fostering their professional growth. The outcome of this study will contribute to our understanding of the process used by teachers to develop their craft as they enter a new, and in some cases their first, school setting. The study will also help district personnel better understand how we can support teachers as they go through that process.

As you participate in this class, you will be writing several reflective journal entries about your first year in the New Albany Plain Local School District. As part of the class, I will be collecting those responses, will provide some interactive feedback, and will return them to you. I will also do reflective writing, and will share it with all of you. You will be asked to respond to my writing and to that of one of your classmates. In addition, you will be reading selected resources for the course, which will include some readings about reflection, and will be participating in large- and small-group discussions. As part of the class, these discussions may be audio-taped and/or field notes may be written during class meetings. If you choose to participate in the study, I will keep a copy of your writings for analysis to look for common themes. In addition, I will be asking for volunteers to participate in two 30-45 minute interviews, which will be transcribed and analyzed for my research. Teacher participation in those interviews will help me explore how this process has or has not impacted the experience of individual teacher participants.

I want to thank you in advance for your input to the study. Your participation is voluntary and will contribute to my doctoral research study. All information will be kept confidential by replacing your name with a pseudonym in all reports of the data. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated. Please feel free to communicate with me about any concerns or questions you have about the study. In addition, if you choose to participate, please know that your participation is entirely voluntary and you may feel free to withdraw participation without negative affect at any time. If you wish to learn about the research outcomes, you are welcome to contact me after the completion of the study.

Sincerely,

Madeline Partlow  Stephen Pape, Ph.D., Advisor
Doctoral Candidate  Associate Professor
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: Reflective Teaching as a Goal for a Teacher Induction Program

Protocol # _______________

I consent to participating in research described by Madeline Partlow, Co-Investigator, and conducted under the direction of her advisor, Dr. Stephen Pape, Principal Investigator. Ms. Partlow has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described.

Please indicate your consent for each aspect of the project.

Yes           No
☐ ☐ I agree to allow the inclusion of my background information form information, reflective journal writing, responses, final evaluation, and final project (if applicable) for analysis in this study.

☐ ☐ I agree to allow the inclusion of my participation in audio-taped large-group and/or small-group discussions and/or field notes.

☐ ☐ I agree to participate in two 30-45 minute individual and/or small-group interviews.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. I understand that my name will not be used in conjunction with the findings presented as a result of the study. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Responsible Research Practices at (800-678-6251). I sign this form freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _______________________________  Signed: _______________________________

(Participant)

Witness: _______________________________  Signed: _______________________________

Pat Stewart, District Representative  Madeline Partlow, Co-Investigator
APPENDIX E

INDUCTION CLASS HANDOUT
New Albany-Plain Local School District Entry Year Program presents

A course offering for Mentees

The Character of Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Hours:</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>Credit Hours:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Cost:</th>
<th>$148</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Session One:** September 22  
K-1 Elementary  
3:30 p.m.  
Introduction to course  
Topics: Graffiti Board of Issues  
Parent Conferences  
Purpose of Reflection  
Small group discussion  
Best Practices

**Session Two:** October 27  
2-5 Elementary  
3:30 p.m.  
Praxis III  
Observation & Evaluation  
Differentiation & IAT Teams

**Session Three:** December 8  
Middle School  
3:30 p.m.  
How Students Learn  
Dr. Gary Sweitzer, Director of Curriculum

**Session Four:** January 19  
High School  
3:30 p.m.  
Classroom Management

**Session Five:** February 23  
K-1 Elementary  
3:30 p.m.  
Topics to be determined by new teachers

**Session Six:** March 23  
2-5 Elementary  
3:30 p.m.  
Presentations:
Topic: Things I’ve Learned

**Session Seven:** April 20  
Middle School  
3:30 p.m.  
Continue Presentations
New Teacher Induction Class
Background Information Form

Name ___________________________ Building ___________________________

Teaching Assignment (Grade Level and subjects or specialty areas) __________________________

Certification Area ___________________ Years of Prior Teaching Experience ___________

Educational Background

Please list your educational background, including educational institution(s) attended, degree(s) completed, and certification received, as well as post-graduate coursework taken (if any):

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Prior Experience

If you have prior work experience (in education or another field), please list that below:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

New Albany Teaching Experience

What are the most challenging areas or issues you have faced so far in your New Albany teaching experience?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Reflection

How do you define reflection? ____________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) how would you rate yourself on reflection? ______________
Please explain why you rate yourself as you do:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Topics of Interest for Teacher Induction Class

What areas or topics would you be most interested in learning about and/or discussing as part of this induction class? (Such as: classroom management, handling of parent concerns, differentiation, etc.)
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

In terms of format, what kind of class activities would you like to see included as part of this class? (Such as: large or small group discussions, partner activities, question and answer sessions, time to talk with peers about specific issues or concerns, etc.) What class formats would be most helpful to you?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What do you hope to gain from this class? How can we make this class useful to you?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Please feel free to share any other information that you feel would be helpful. This could include information about yourself (personally or professionally), questions about the class, suggestions, etc.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX G

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Script for setting the purpose of the interview with participants:

This induction class has been structured to provide planned opportunities for reflection through the use of: class readings, class discussion, small group discussion, reflective journal writing, and journal responses. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how participation in this class, and those activities, impacts teacher participants. The interview will be of a conversational nature and is designed with the purpose of gaining insight into your learning as it relates to your participation in this class. It is my hope that this information can be used to help us to improve our teacher induction class and better support the efforts of newly hired teachers as they transition through their first year of their work in our district. As part of this interview, I will be asking you a variety of questions. Please feel free to expand on any of these as they relate to your learning from the course itself, or from the specific strategies being used that include: class readings, class discussions, small group discussions, reflective journal writing, journal responses.

Interview questions for individual interviews and/or small group interviews or discussions may include items such as, but will not be limited to, the following:

1. What have you learned through your participation in the teacher induction class so far (if anything)? Please share some examples or evidence of that learning.

2. What impact, if any, has the use of these strategies on your relationships with other participants and/or facilitators of the induction class? Please explain.

3. What impact, if any, has the use of these strategies had on your work with your students? Please explain.

4. Which strategies, if any, have you found to be helpful to you in terms of your transition into your new job in this district? Please explain.

5. Which strategies do you believe have been the most helpful to you in terms of fostering your learning and/or developing as a reflective teacher? Please explain.

6. Have the course readings been a source of new learning to you? If so, please explain. If not, how could they be improved in the future?

7. What do you see as the advantages and/or disadvantages of the reflective journal writing process? Please explain.
8. What do you see as the advantages and/or disadvantages of writing responses to others’ journal writing? Please explain.

9. Have the small discussion groups impacted your thinking about reflection? Please explain.

10. What impact, if any, do you feel this induction class has/has not had on your teaching? Please explain.

11. What impact, if any, do you feel this induction class has had on your professional growth? Please explain.

12. Have your perceptions about reflection, or the use of any of these strategies, changed over time? If so, please explain.

13. Do you feel that you will continue the process of any reflection in any form in the future beyond this class? Why or why not?
APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Participant*</th>
<th>Years of Prior Experience</th>
<th>Building Assignment(s)</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>K-1 Building</td>
<td>February 9, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>K-1 Building</td>
<td>February 15, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Middle School and High School</td>
<td>February 17, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>March 6, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>March 10, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>March 10, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>$\frac{1}{2}$</td>
<td>2-5 Building</td>
<td>March 14, 2006</td>
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<td>Middle School</td>
<td>March 14, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathleen (2\textsuperscript{nd} Interview)</td>
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<td>Middle School and High School</td>
<td>June 8, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William (2\textsuperscript{nd} Interview)</td>
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<td>June 12, 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Names have been replaced with pseudonyms
APPENDIX I

GROUNDED SURVEY
Induction Class Survey

Part A. Background Information—Please circle your response for each answer.

I work in the (circle all that apply):

K-1 Building 2-3 Building 4-5 Building Middle School High School

Before working here, I had taught or worked in K-12 schools (full-time employment) for:

0-1 years 2-3 years 4-5 years 6-7 years 8 or more years

My current position is a:

Teaching Position Non-Teaching Position

Part B. For the following statements (items 1-10) indicate your level of agreement using the scale provided below. Please circle your response for each answer.

SD = Strongly Disagree  D = Disagree  N = Not Sure A = Agree  SA = Strongly agree

1. The induction program has helped me with my transition into my school(s) and the district.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

2. Reflection is an important component of effective teaching.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

3. The induction program has helped me to reflect more on my teaching/my work.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

4. Writing reflections has helped me take the time to reflect more on my practice.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

5. Responding to the facilitator’s reflections helped shape the class to meet my needs.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

6. Receiving feedback on my reflections from the facilitator was helpful.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

7. Receiving feedback on my reflections from a colleague was helpful
   SD  D  N  A  SA

8. The small group discussions have been helpful
   SD  D  N  A  SA

9. It was helpful to hear from teachers in other small groups in the large group discussions.
   SD  D  N  A  SA

10. My mentor has been helpful to me this year.
    SD  D  N  A  SA

11. I feel I have grown professionally through my participation in the induction class.
    SD  D  N  A  SA

12. Over the course of the year I feel I have grown more reflective.
    SD  D  N  A  SA
Part C. Using a scale of (1) low to (5) high, how would you rate yourself on reflection?

1 2 3 4 5

Part D. Based on your experience in this year’s induction class, please rank the following in terms of which have been the most helpful (1) to those that were the least helpful (6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing reflections</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving responses from facilitator</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving responses from colleagues</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large group/class discussions</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group discussions</td>
<td>______</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class readings and handouts</td>
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</table>

Comments (if any):

Part E. Based on your experience this year, which factors do you feel are the most important for us to address in an induction class? Please rate these factors based on their importance using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning more about the district</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping me transition into the district</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting emotional support from others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a “safe space” to share problems I am having</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the opportunity to talk with other teachers about issues of concern to me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting help in dealing with difficult parents</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting help with classroom management</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting help on time management and/or organization</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on my own teaching</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with others about my own teaching</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part F. Please share your thoughts on the following.

1. What challenges you have faced in your first year in our district? What additional help could we provide to future classes in those areas?

2. What components of the induction program (writing, responding, large group discussions, small group discussions, readings, presentations, class topics, activities, etc.) should we plan to continue in the future?

3. What additional suggestions do you have for improvement of the induction class for the future?