Essay review

**Teacher induction at the crossroads: An attempt to harmonize the chaos**


Since the mid-1980s, the support of beginning teachers has become an important topic. Since that period, numerous support programmes have been developed, most of them implying a deficit model of teacher training. Gold (1996) has listed the types of support that are available under two major headings: (1) instructional-related support necessary for success in the classroom and the school; and (2) psychological support emphasizing confidence building, development of a positive self-esteem, learning to handle stress, etc. She concluded that, in most of the literature, the emphasis has been on the instructional support, which reflects a restricted view of teachers and teaching. Gold argued that personal-psychological support is also needed, a kind of support that stimulates one’s own role in personal and professional development, as well as inquiry-based activities guided by a broad knowledge base. According to her vision, it is insufficient to focus teacher support on one or a few years; instead, she finds it important that the entire life span is considered.

Tickle’s book offers a re-conceptualization of induction, practical principles for the development of new teachers’ practice which will enable teachers to contribute actively to the reconstruction of education, and a proposal for support programmes that go beyond the first year of teaching. At the heart of Tickle’s perspective are the new teachers themselves, who can bring much to education and humanity on the basis of collective responsibilities. In Tickle’s book, teachers are seen as dynamic and creative individuals. In the preface to the book, one of the series editors wrote about this view on teachers that

“Recognition of the professional commitment, creative potential and intellectual capabilities of new entrants will not only help to establish the foundation for their own continued professional learning, but also harness valuable resources in the ongoing transformation of education (p. x).”

In our view, this editor’s quote can be seen as the essence of Tickle’s ‘way ahead’. The perspective he offers consists of important elements strongly related to each other. In this review, we will discuss each of these elements separately, but first we will pay some attention to what teacher induction generally implies. Then, we will mention some strong and weak points of the book. We end with the conclusion that Tickle has written a book that should be read by all who are concerned with teacher induction. Both as researchers and teacher educators, we believe that the picture offered in this book is really a ‘way ahead’.

1. The induction of new teachers

By teacher induction is usually meant the transition from being a student teacher to being a teacher of students (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The teacher induction period is generally referred to as the new teacher’s first year of teaching after his or her qualification as a teacher. The first point is that the situation new teachers find themselves in is a vulnerable one:

- their knowledge and skills are tested in real conditions at school and classroom level,
they are taking the responsibility of teaching on their own,

- they have to balance contradictory views regarding their practice, which derive from the culture of the specific school, their personal expectations, and the professional norms in general.

The second point is that the first year of teaching may have a strong impact on the teacher’s career, i.e., whether or not he or she will continue in the profession (Gold, 1996; Loughran, Brown, & Doecke, 2001). Whatever attempts are made to prepare pre-service teachers for their work, this preparation is never adequate. Induction programmes, therefore, are very important. An induction programme can be conceived of as a planned and formalized system of assistance and support that enables new teachers not just to survive but to prosper during their first year(s) of teaching (Cole, 1994) and gives them an impulse toward continuous improvement.

In the last two decades, the number of induction programmes has grown tremendously. Gold (1996), for example, reviewed several programmes in the USA which attract attention because of their programme components, alternative structures, etc. Researchers, policy makers, and various professional organizations in the USA increasingly call for quality induction programmes which last a number of years and are characterized by an integrated approach to new teacher support, development, and assessment based on high standards for teaching and learning, built on school/university partnerships, and featuring a strong mentoring component (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Nevertheless, in the USA and elsewhere, there is much rhetoric:

Most induction mandates do not rest on an understanding of teacher learning, a vision of good teaching or a broad view of the role formal induction can play in new teacher development. Often they lack the necessary resources to support effective programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1031).

Teacher induction may reinforce traditional norms and practices rather than promoting more powerful teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993). This is likely to happen when teacher induction is seen as a way of helping a new teacher to cope with his or her first year on the job, the help being given by a mentor with limited time and ideas about his or her role, in a school where teachers are not used to working together in productive ways, and where no resources are available to enable the teacher to learn to meet standards (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). If the teaching profession has to undertake the challenge to contribute to the fulfilment of the role of schooling in contemporary societies, then it has to respond to an extended view of its role: educating active professionals who are continuously developing and taking responsibility for their decisions.

Whatever their nature, it can be concluded that more or less all beginning teachers benefit from support programmes during their induction period or their first year of teaching after initial teacher training. It is agreed upon now that an induction programme is most meaningful for new teachers when it takes place in a school setting where it is part of a wider policy of professional development for all teachers.

2. Tickle’s contribution

2.1. The theoretical basis of the book

In England, new statutory arrangements were introduced (September 1999) and supported by the government to ensure that all newly qualified teachers receive structured support and training to consolidate and extend the skills learnt in their initial training (Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001). Newly qualified teachers can reach their qualified teacher status when they meet the induction standards at the end of their first year of teaching. This new English system, but also systems for teacher induction in other countries as well, is expected to help new teachers to bridge the gap between initial and longer-term training. Tickle argues that this bridge metaphor can be helpful, but not when induction is simply seen as the socialization of novices in accepted practices which exist on the ‘other side’. He rejects the
‘deficit’ model, which dominated the theory and guided the practice of teacher education for a long time (Eraut, 1987) and presumes, in his own terms,

A broader notion of the teacher as professional, which includes the development of personal qualities and dispositions, the place of the self in teaching, and a much broader sense of competence than just the technical classroom skills of instruction (p. 23).

The context of his book, therefore, is twofold: (1) uncertainty about what should be done in support programmes to guarantee new teachers’ further professional development; and (2) uncertainty about where and what precisely to invest in their lives and work, or what returns the investors expect from those in whom they entrust education’s future (p. 3).

Tickle also describes several conceptual difficulties and logistical problems which explain why induction remains a persistent problem. Add to these the current social conditions and physical environments of teaching, and the only conclusion that can be drawn is that, in many schools, only a minimal approach to induction can and will be implemented. This is an approach which masks different conceptions of education and is based on an induction curriculum in which the emphasis is merely on descriptions of content, method, and assessment of students.

In order to avoid a minimal approach to teacher induction, Tickle argues for a reconceptualization of induction. The ways he proposes to move forward are based on a thorough study of the literature on different topics in the field of teaching and teacher education. Tickle’s book brings much of this literature together in a coherent picture that might indeed be seen as a ‘way ahead’ in a context of living with a problematic teacher induction.

2.2. The role of knowledge, professional characteristics, and personal qualities

In Chapter 2, Tickle considers aspects of professional knowledge centred around academic subject matter, learners, classroom management, pedagogical skills, the working context of the school, curriculum, assessment, and the routines and functions of being a teacher. This knowledge is prescribed and generally seen as representative of teachers’ work accompanied by a conception of competence as a measurable skill. It leads to a curriculum or teaching paradigm where the emphasis is on the acquisition of knowledge and not on the construction of knowledge. Tickle argues that this knowledge should not be adopted at face value nor taken for granted as the only way of thinking about professional knowledge. In Chapter 3, he elaborates an extended view of the teacher’s role and argues that there is not a coherent body of knowledge but only a minimum core basis. At least complementary (and not supplementary!) to this knowledge of teaching is the knowledge teachers develop themselves through ‘professional practical theorizing’ (p. 73). Tickle argues for a healthy, sceptical attitude towards the nature and application of expertise formulated and prescribed by others. He writes that

There is a great difference between induction into a workforce operating prescribed curriculum content and techniques of instruction, and induction into a process of professional self-development, reconstruction of institutionalized practices, and active participation in reform of the education service. While the former might involve surrender to imposed ideas and the obedient use of method, the latter draws upon values, personal qualities, and professional characteristics of very different kinds. If these are essential then we might presume that they deserve to be identified and developed (p. 69).

Tickle’s notion of teaching includes personally reflexive and critically active teachers. In addition, Tickle points to the reality of beginning teachers who leave the profession when their intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of teaching are not met in induction programmes. They should have the opportunity to make their educational aims and values explicit.

In his focus on personal qualities, Tickle wants to include aspects of one’s self as educational professional dispositions towards the purpose and consequences of schooling and the use of personal agency in the pursuit of personal and educational
reconstruction. In connection with this, he states that

The reason for seeking a deeper view of the teacher-self stems from a concern for a more tolerant, humane, and person-centred kind of education for both teachers and pupils. It is a bid for a more inclusive notion of professional development, in which the essentials of being an educator, and the bases of personal growth, perspective, and identity, can sit alongside subject knowledge, instructional strategies and curriculum organization as worthy of attention (p. 88/89).

New teachers, in particular, are shaping and reshaping their selves as teachers. Aspects of self, therefore, should play an essential part in induction programmes. Up till now, the interface between aspects of personal virtues and professional life has been given little attention. From the following quote, it becomes clear that this interface is for Tickle the key to aspirations of reflective practice and action research:

It is, in my view, the route by which the compliant technician can escape to become the critically active tactician, equipped with a sense of purpose and with political strategy for bringing about both personal and social change. For unless one has a sense of self-development and the expertise to examine, develop and appropriately deploy professional characteristics and personal qualities, it seems unlikely that the adoption of a critical perspective on teaching and its circumstances will carry very far (p. 92).

2.3. Induction as a research-based practice

Tickle’s way ahead implies and even demands that all who are involved in teacher induction should adopt, collectively, a research stance. For this, he draws on the work about action research of Carr and Kemmis (1986), Elliot (1991), and McKernan (1991), who generally see action research as a means for the continuing education of teachers. Tickle states that

The idea of the teacher as a researcher can be used as a basis for the development of new teachers, as well as those with more experience. Taking that approach, I believe, provides an imaginative solution to the educational problem of teacher induction (p. 21).

It is very important that newly qualified teachers are engaged in research-based practices which they themselves can use to guide their own experience and development. However, this cannot be realized without the supporting system of conditions about which Tickle writes in the fifth chapter. The conditions which have to be transformed in order to support this new approach to teacher induction include the state and local administrative roles about which Tickle is not optimistic (not only in England but also in other countries). In his opinion, the administration’s duties are narrowly and unimaginatively defined and certainly lack the image of inquiry-based learning. According to Tickle, it is that image and that mission that needs to be established first and foremost in the policies, the conditions, and the enactment of support programmes (p. 139).

Head teachers are also very important for an effective induction programme. In this respect Tickle lists a number of responsibilities of head teachers. He also lists a number of key characteristics of a good induction tutor, such as having a supportive, constructive, and encouraging style, being accessible and reliable, and showing empathy. To these and many other key characteristics must be added

(... a comprehensive understanding of professional knowledge and expertise. In the way ahead it will be necessary also to add to these qualities the professional dispositions and expertise in research-based teaching, and the capacity of pedagogical leadership that would be in place in a school that is a learning community (p. 145).

The sequence of events listed by Tickle may help new teachers to become familiar with the realms of professional knowledge and expertise that they are expected to develop through their research. This sequence of events guarantees that common needs
are met from the period soon after appointment (e.g., providing welcome and introductions) until the third term (e.g., extending the understanding of professional knowledge and maintaining oversight of national, local, and school policy developments).

The aspects and principles that underlie practitioner research are described by Tickle in Chapter 6. They resemble those that underlie the kind of learning community called for by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998). Tickle states that, in such a community, principles of openness, open-mindedness, and sensitivity are essential for professional judgement. Chapter 6 also contains many suggestions for doing action research. According to Tickle, it is essential that the induction of new teachers forms part of this learning community in which a research stance is taken. Consequently, induction is part of teachers’ learning throughout their careers and is not limited to a period of one year.

2.4. Learning from induction

Different views on learning to teach exist; in all these views, the discrepancy between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge is seen as an important problem to address. In one of his earlier publications, Tickle (1994) stated that the induction of new teachers mainly draws on a model of learning from experience accompanied by some notions about apprenticeship and the development of reflective practice. This model assumes that reflection by teachers bridges the gap between both kinds of teaching knowledge. Tickle argues that, in this model (and other models as well), little or no attention is paid to the process of teacher development itself. Meanwhile, he says, it is crucial how one sees a learner: as someone who is trained to become a performer of professional practice or as an active creator of that practice. This latter point of view places the learner at the centre; for Tickle, this is an essential component of professionalism.

In this book, learning presupposes team work. Seeing teacher learning as individual implies that teachers may remain silent and keep their practice hidden. Instead, new teachers must be part of teams that recognize their strengths and contributions. New teachers must build their selves through interaction with others. Building a self implies a reflective capability. Knowledge of self is seen by Tickle as an element of professional knowledge, which—together with emotions—needs to be a substantial part of learning to teach. As part of learning, it is also important that (new) teachers build a relationship between private and public educational knowledge. It is argued that there are school climates in which there is guided reflection, discussion, processes of demonstration, etc., through which these essential elements of learning are met. Meeting such elements is not only crucial for the period of teacher induction, but pertains to teachers’ entire lives (p. 129).

Inquiry approaches are very promising for teacher learning. On page 120, Tickle summarizes two important features of research-based learning, namely: (1) knowledge is actively constructed within learning communities, not in isolation from the environment, nor from broader professional, educational, economic, and political contexts of practice; and (2) learning is not only learning by experience but also from experience and accommodates learning through reference to other sources in addition to direct encounters in practical events. According to Tickle, new teachers can only become effective teachers when they have become effective researchers first. The ability to become an effective researcher should be developed during the early phases of teaching.

3. Strong and ‘weak’ points of the book

Tickle balances persuasively between utopia and realism in sketching ‘the way ahead’ for teacher induction. He offers an interesting book, in which the theoretical issues are successfully related with their practical implications both in terms of educational policy and practice. In the first part of the book (Chapters 1–3), Tickle argues about the need to conceptualize teacher induction and offers a well-documented analysis of the professional knowledge of teachers. Going ‘closer to the core’, he elaborates issues not often analysed, such as the several aspects of the professional characteristics and personal qualities of teachers.
He connects successfully the positive elements of different approaches to form a coherent theoretical stance. For example, he ‘bridges’ the technical and the critical transformative approaches to teaching. The second part of the book (Chapters 4–6), starting with an interesting analysis of learning from induction, which could apply to teacher professional development in general, introduces specific ideas and guidelines for the practice of teacher induction.

In terms of structure and style, we consider Tickle’s main strengths to be: (1) the way he makes explicit his assumptions and exposes the restrictions of his views, (2) the multiple sources that support his argumentation, (3) the fact that he manages not to be too ‘British-oriented’ in his educational policy references, and (4) the successful structure and connection of the chapters in the first part of the book. As weaknesses, we consider: (1) the lack of balance between the two parts of the book, the second part being more analytical with a less formal style of writing compared with the first part; and (2) the lack of a concluding chapter at the end of the book. In a concluding chapter, for example, he could have reflected on the picture he offers of teacher induction and given examples of schools in which components of this picture are realized, the problems they encounter, and how they try to solve these problems. There are schools in which teachers successfully question their practice in collegial and critical ways. For this, inquiry-based approaches appear to be quite successful (Richardson & Placier, 2001). To a new teacher, this implies that he or she is surrounded by colleagues who work together, who are continuously dissatisfied with aspects of their practice, and who respond well to an inquiry approach. It remains unclear in Tickle’s book how schools can learn to become such learning communities and, thus, be adequate learning environments for new teachers.

We particularly want to draw attention to one, in our view, very important condition mentioned by Tickle, namely that all the teachers in the school take a research stance. We feel that Tickle pays too little attention to the fact that teachers should not only have respect for research, but also a genuine desire to engage in it (Bottery, 1997). In our view, it seems to be more realistic and necessary, too, that other forms of professional development coexist with action research in one and the same school. For example, learning through participation in study groups, peer coaching, and critical friends might have a place in teacher learning as well (e.g., Glickman, 2002). Williams, Prestage, and Bedward (2001) also pointed to the significance of collaborative cultures, at both school and individual teacher levels, for the quality of induction programmes, though not necessarily or only through action research. Like these authors, we would argue for more variety in forms of teacher learning than Tickle suggests.

4. Conclusion

In our review of Tickle’s book, we have chosen to highlight those elements that in our view are most important to the points the author wishes to emphasize regarding teacher induction. We are aware that, by highlighting certain aspects, little or no attention can be paid to other aspects that are also relevant. It is an imaginative picture that Tickle offers which, despite some of our remarks in the preceding section, consists of a clear and coherent vision. The most important ingredients of this vision pertain to the interface between personal and professional characteristics, doing justice to both theoretical knowledge and knowledge developed by practitioners, induction as an integral part of learning throughout a teacher’s career, and learning that takes place through collective action research.

Concluding this review, we believe that, in such a picture of what should be found important and how things should work in schools, the period of teacher induction can be a very positive learning period resulting in teachers who can really function as professionals. Pushing teachers will, in our view, destroy the profession, particularly when they are forced to implement strategies from above or to meet external demands laid upon them. We see Tickle’s book as a strong advocate of a similar view. Tickle’s book about teacher induction, therefore, really is a way ahead and should be
read by all those who worry about today’s teachers as well as future teachers.

References


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