Exploring the Benefits of the Language Minority Teacher Induction Project

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Introduction

Peer support. A chance to learn what it means to be a teacher researcher. Reflective learning. These were the initial reasons I chose to participate in the Language Minority Teacher Induction Project (LMTIP). During my participation in the project, I experienced these and numerous additional benefits that together created a truly wonderful year of growth and learning. The project was a tremendous source of support for me as a first year teacher, each facet of the project providing a different variety of support. In exploring the benefits of the project, I will discuss its varied components and detail how they benefited me throughout the year.

Components

The most constant and fundamental component of the project was the reflective journal. As teacher researchers striving to gain insight on our own teaching, it was necessary to keep a journal in which we recorded our questions, observations, struggles, and triumphs. The journal did not require daily entries nor were the topics fixed. We wrote frequently, both independently and together during our bi-weekly induction group meetings. The journal was simply a processing, reflecting, and recording tool for our growth and questioning throughout the year. We began our journals attempting to define what teacher research meant to us and recording our response to an article on teacher research. Early journal entries also contained preliminary questions that might lead to possible research as well as experiments with creating rituals for journal writing. Our journals eventually became primarily reflective. I used the journal to record successes and failures, especially as a space to both vent frustrations and brainstorm solutions to challenges I faced in the classroom. After several months of journaling, we spent an induction group meeting highlighting recurring questions and concerns with the aim of identifying research questions. Two main threads ran through my journal entries—integrating literature into the science classroom and student motivation. My journal became a place where I not only listed my thoughts, frustrations, and goals within these two areas but I also posed questions about them and found within my own writing many answers to my own questions. As I look back at my journal I can track my professional growth over the year and can reflect on the triumphs I have achieved with my students.

The second most integral part of the project was the induction group. Our induction group met twice a month for an hour to an hour and a half. We began our induction group meetings by discussing our standout successes and any challenges we were facing in our classrooms. We often spent time journaling either reflectively about our classrooms or on a fixed topic, sometimes relating to a reading we had done for that
group meeting. We then would discuss any readings or “homework” we had for that group, ranging in topics from how to journal to research in the classroom. We hosted a guest speaker in our group several times to address teacher research and to help us form our own research questions. A member of the group took minutes each week so that a running record of our work was kept. The introductory discussions of each meeting were personally very beneficial. They became a forum to voice frustrations and successes and to receive feedback, suggestions, and great ideas from my peers and from the mentor teacher. As a first year teacher, I believe it is very important to have people with whom you can discuss your experiences and bounce ideas off of. This group was the only regular time during which I could reflect with others on my teaching, and doing so provided me with tremendous support. The chance to read and discuss a variety of professional literature was also very valuable and was an activity that I probably would not have done on my own if not encouraged by the induction group. Lastly, our time with the guest speaker was very valuable. We were able to question and receive advice from someone with extensive teacher research experience and transfer that advice to our own work.

The third most beneficial component of the project for me was the opportunity to attend various professional conferences. The first conference I attended on November 9, 2001 featured Stephanie Harvey speaking on “Literacy for Life: Making It Real.” This conference covered many reading strategies, including bridging from known to new information while reading, interacting with text while reading, and questioning and responding to text. My students and I benefited from this conference by using several of the strategies discussed during reading class. The next conference I attended that was supported by the LMTIP was the Teacher Researchers Conference. This conference was a great opportunity to meet with local colleagues and exchange thoughts and ideas on a wide variety of topics. I attended a roundtable on listening while reading and how it affects comprehension and enjoyment of the book as well as a roundtable on the teaching of vocabulary in content area classes using a variety of strategies. Both were interesting and I learned many creative teaching strategies from my colleagues. The last conference I attended was given by Ellin Keene on the topic of “Tapping the Power of Thinking to Teach Reading Comprehension.” This conference covered what is essential in literacy learning, what strategies proficient readers use, and how to teach these strategies to our students of reading. The conference gave a great overview of what is truly essential in our teaching of literacy learning, especially the vital strategies that we need to explicitly teach our students.

Benefits

Although I was unable to complete an action research project this year, I did benefit from watching the other members of my induction group navigate the process of classroom research. Though I did not reach the actual experimentation stage of the research, I did participate a great deal in forming questions and making observations in my classroom. I gained an appreciation for the classroom as a place of research and saw how my group members became informed about their own classroom practices through the research they conducted.

Overall, the Language Minority Teacher Induction Project was a beneficial experience for me. I gained specific benefit from reflective journaling, induction group
meetings, professional conferences, and the process of action research. Most importantly, the project afforded me a collegial place of belonging as a new teacher and a tremendous amount of professional support. I would recommend the project to any first year teacher seeking to grow professionally and personally alongside their colleagues.