

Beginning Teachers' Induction in Australia: Characteristics, Experience and Development Trend

LI Li^{[a],*}; ZHANG Fang^[b]

^[a]Postdoctoral Researcher, School of history and culture, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

^[b]Postgraduate, School of political science and public management, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The development of beginning teachers' induction in Australia has greatly improved the quality of education, and has taken an important part in teacher education in the federal government. In order to promote further development of the quality of teacher education, Australia government explores different strategies and constructs its own education system, including completing overall induction program and formulating various training models.

Key words: Australia; Beginning teacher; Teacher education; Induction;

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INTRODUCTION

With the integration of international education and the educational needs of individuals, Australia begins to recognize that schools' educational goals as well as educators' capabilities and basic qualities are becoming increasingly significant; at the same time, in order to help beginning teachers to better adjust themselves to the teaching environment, Australia has gradually formed a relatively mature induction system for beginning teachers. This paper attempts to explore the characteristics,

experience and development trend of Australia's beginning teachers' induction, with the hope of further improving the quality of teacher education in China.

1. CHARACTERISTICS

The development of beginning teachers' induction in Australia has become an important part of teacher education carried out by the federal government, and is playing a crucial role in improving the quality of education in Australia. On the basis of learning from the experience of developed countries such as America and the United Nations, Australia's beginning teachers' induction pays more attention to its own circumstances. In this sense, it has formed unique characteristics in the long process of development.

1.1 Diversified Training Models

The beginning teachers' induction in Australia is characterized by a significant variety of training models, which gives full play to the enthusiasm of staff members of schools. As the supreme manager, school principle plays an irreplaceable role in terms of formulating and implementing induction system including selecting beginning teachers' tutors, attending beginning teachers' open courses, and dealing with feedback information about these beginning teachers. Through the investigation of beginning teachers in Australia, we find that many of them prefer principals to attend their open classes, because it makes them feel attached to their principals and could stimulate their enthusiasm for work. To achieve this goal, each school district in Australia usually founds an induction office in the first beginning. Besides, it often makes the advantage of the internet and other individual services to provide beginning teachers with a platform for discussion. In addition, Teachers' Induction Festival, courses in school districts, and student service teams are also utilized to finish the induction for beginning teachers. To be more specific, Teachers' Induction Festival

is held through the internet; activities on that day have to be scheduled by the beginning teachers themselves; nevertheless, with regard to the specific days for on-line training, beginning teachers and experienced teachers need to unite together. With online support provided by individuals or groups, school districts' curriculum and student service teams can ensure a good training of new teachers (Xu, 2006). However, each school district in Australia has different training models; for instance, Queensland's Roman School District focuses on targeted planning and guidance. It also increases the network conference calls and the visits between schools; Tasmania's Arthur School District focuses on offering every beginning teacher a specific tutor, so as to create a personalized one-year support plan for them. This not only makes up for the inadequacy of school-based training, but also motivates each school to carry out teacher induction.

1.2 Comprehensive Induction Programme for Beginning Teachers

With the development of teacher education, Australia has constantly revised and improved it, and has gradually formed a comprehensive and distinctive induction programme for beginning teachers. As far as the model is concerned, the training is an integration of education system, school district and school-based training; as for the regulatory agencies, teacher training institutions and regulatory agencies at all levels have strengthened their supervision on both the school district and the local education administration; the institutions who carry out teacher education have been introduced to the market and have cooperated with each other in competition. At the same time, with the development of the Internet, Australian government strongly advocates online induction, and actively develops and uses the educational resources on the Internet. All these have created a broader space for the development of beginning teachers' induction. In addition to the educational website made by the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations, Departments of Education and Training in every state have also established relevant educational websites. These educational websites are interconnected with each other, so that beginning teachers can have easy access to training at any time and in any place. This breaks down restrictions in terms of geography and time; in particular, beginning teachers who work in the geographically-isolated northern area are provided with more opportunities to get access to the educational experience and educational guidance. Besides, beginning teachers could consult any experienced teacher on the Internet in terms of the problems related to teaching, and could have the fastest access to the information in need, so as to make up for the limitations of their school-based induction.

1.3 Diverse Forms of Education

According to the survey of the beginning teachers in Australia, misunderstandings tend to arise between

beginning teachers and their tutors due to improper communication. In this sense, tutors need to have a good communication with beginning teachers, and need to discuss the problems in teaching and life together. In addition, social activities for beginning teachers inside and outside school need to be regularly held, so that these teachers can exchange their feelings and teaching skills in the induction period, thereby enhancing their confidence and improving their teaching skills. To nutshell, Australia's beginning teachers' induction is a good combination of education theories and practical teaching skills. It provides a variety of opportunities and situations to begin teachers so that they can better adapt themselves to the current social situation as well as to the schools and community culture. Besides, the beginning teachers' induction in Australia has given full play to the professional resources and other resources outside the school, to ensure the successful implementation of induction, to improve the quality of induction, and to guarantee its consistency and fairness. Judging from the specific practices of Victoria (The Tasmania Educational Leaders Institute, 2002), its Department of Education and the Association for the Development of Teacher Training have formulated relevant documents of beginning teachers' induction before distributing them to school principals. In this way, principals are enabled to understand the various proposals, lists and schedules on beginning teachers' induction. Besides, these documents cover all the activities for induction, including the period before induction, the first two days, the first week, the first month, the second month, and the third month. Moreover, among the documents, textbooks are only used as supplementary teaching materials; schools can adjust themselves depending on the circumstances. Also, schools are encouraged to design their own induction book, clarify their training methods and approaches, as well as make clear the various responsibilities of the participants, so as to fully guarantee the quality of beginning teachers' induction.

2. EXPERIENCE

The beginning teachers' induction in Australia has taken into full account beginning teachers' needs, so it is comprehensive and targeted. In order to better carry out beginning teachers' induction, Australia has taken a series of measures. On the one hand, these measures focus on practice, training, guidance and action research; on the other hand, they attach importance to the integration of various professional and counseling resources outside school, thus accelerating teachers' professional development. Through the implementation of these effective measures, Australia ensures a smooth development of teacher induction and achieves good results. To sum up, Australia's experience could be summarized as follows:

2.1 Providing Induction Materials

Australian government provides induction materials to begin teachers in order to solve their problems caused by working in a new teaching environment. Providing induction materials is the most basic form of Australia's school-based teacher induction, which runs through the whole induction period of beginning teachers. Induction materials include two parts. One is "the beginning of the school"; the other is the "beginning of the classroom". They are mainly descriptive information about the school as well as teaching. Matters needed to caution and problems needed to solve are clarified in these materials. For example, beginning teachers need to ensure that they have to get familiar with the practices of classroom organization and management before school opens. Also, they need to familiarize themselves with the problems that often arise in teaching. Moreover, beginning teachers need to know the procedures of assessment and reporting course after class (Australian Commonwealth Department of Education, para.2, 2000). After learning the induction materials, beginning teachers could be quickly and effectively learn more about the school's policies, procedures, and other aspects of information. What is more, they will be more familiar with the school and the teaching environment. In this sense, they can well adjust themselves to the working environment.

2.2 Opening Induction Courses

Since 2001, there are 38 agencies in Australia providing more than 410 kinds of induction courses (Australian Commonwealth Department of Education, para.2, 2003). Judging from the nature of these courses, they are mainly divided into orientation courses and training courses, among which orientation courses play a crucial role. They are generally given by the local education authority or by the schools where beginning teachers hold a post during the period of pre-employment. Different and flexible forms and contents of inductive education are taken based on the size of the training and time. It could be either imparting basic knowledge or could be discussion, observation, demonstration and practice over a period of time. In this process, school has the responsibility to introduce its overall situation to beginning teachers, including school facilities, school policies, teaching goals and development direction; at the same time, teachers' center and schools' tutors will guide and train beginning teachers in a different manner according to their own circumstances, such as class observation between new and old teachers, seminars, inter-school exchanges, cooperative teaching, professional action research, e-learning, and so forth. This could enhance the basic qualities of beginning teachers in a comprehensive and personalized manner. We have good reasons to say that the opening of induction courses is conducive to the psychological growth of beginning teachers and also to their professional development.

2.3 Forming Induction Groups

When a school has only a few beginning teachers, the school will match beginning teachers with experienced teachers, so as to help determine the beginning teachers' goals of professional development. Of course, some personnel in universities and training institutions outside the school are also involved in induction for these beginning teachers to provide them with adequate and effective help. For instance, some schools set up "support groups for beginning teachers", absorbing all kinds of members including principals, university teachers, local education supervisors and tutors. These members' respective responsibilities are provided, so that all of them can play a part, and promote the effectiveness of group work as far as possible. It is worth mentioning that the university teachers provide first-line guidance; besides, supervisors in school districts will regularly go to schools to know the teaching status quo; in addition, school administrators have established reasonable rules and regulations. In order to improve the professional standard of induction courses, to explore scientific teaching methods for subjects, and to promote the efficiency of beginning teachers' professional development, some schools have carried out specialized professional development activities for beginning teachers. To be more specific, they will regularly hold meetings to explain every institutional policy and procedure to beginning teachers; they will hold seminars to discuss classroom management, stress management, teaching strategies, and students' diverse learning needs, thus providing specific and operational advices for beginning teachers. In the course of these activities-based training, tutors and related personnel will timely monitor the situation of beginning teachers, and revise or update educational plan according to the current situation in a timely manner to ensure their progress in development. Moreover, tutors and related personnel will offer special assistance to those who fail to reach the training standards. More specific and detailed development goals will be formulated to ensure that these beginning teachers could reach the minimum standards as soon as possible.

2.4 Establishing Class Auditing and Discussion System

Australian government requires schools to establish class auditing system for beginning teachers, whose main purpose is to allow beginning teachers to learn from the experience of other teachers while at the same time accumulate their own experience. Besides, the system also aims to provide beginning teachers with opportunities to raise their own teaching ideas through the understanding of other teachers' professional progress and teaching issues, thus improving their professional skills. The class auditing system for beginning teachers is mainly based on the idea of making a school-based teaching life, which points out that the most effective

way for beginning teachers' inductive education is to discuss over the teaching after the observation. This is also one of the most effective ways to improve beginning teachers' teaching strategies and skills. The main reason is that this system requires beginning teachers and other education personnel to make detailed plans in advance, and to raise problems such as the purpose, content, time, methods of observations (Marsh, 2005). And then through the reflection and exchanges in and after class, they can discuss the various problems of teaching. All these will not only help to improve beginning teachers' reflective ability, but also will help improve their skills of evaluating classes, and thus improve their practical abilities, as well as promote their professional development quickly and efficiently.

3. DEVELOPMENT TREND

Going with the wave of globalization, Australian government hopes to improve beginning teachers' induction from three aspects, i.e. valuing school-based induction, strengthening the cooperative partnership with universities, and actively developing online induction. The details are as follows:

3.1 Valuing School-Based Induction

Since the 1990s, "school-based" teacher education has become an important trend. Such a form of teachers' continuing education, which centers on elementary and secondary schools where teacher holds a post and which revolves around schools' teaching activities, is a revolutionary change. It has achieved a transformation from being carried out outside school to be carried out inside school.^[6] School-based inductions emphasize the professional development of beginning teachers based on the advancement of the school itself. It has incorporated beginning teachers' professional development into the whole operation of the school. In a systematic and scientific school-based induction system, there are clear goals, reasonable procedures, rich and targeted training contents. In 2002, "An Ethic of Care: Effective Program for Beginning Teachers" was released by Australian government who proposed "school-based induction program" and established six basic objectives: First, enable beginning teachers to have a good transition from being students to being teachers; second, let beginning teachers well adapt themselves to the community, school and classroom environment; third, make beginning teachers understand their teaching roles and responsibilities; fourth, promote the professional development of beginning teachers; fifth, make beginning teachers feel comfortable in personal life and in the teaching work; sixth, increase the induction rate and the retention rate of beginning teachers (Australian Commonwealth Department of Education, para.4, 2002). In this sense, we can know from the "program" that the goal of Australia's beginning

teachers' induction includes teachers adaptation to the new teaching environment, and also include the promotion of their professional standards and self-confidence. It breaks down the traditional isolated development of teachers' profession, but puts more emphasis on beginning teachers' classroom practices at school, as well as focuses on the real behaviors of beginning teachers in the classroom. So we can say that such teacher induction is concerned about beginning teachers' teaching abilities and their ability of reflecting on teaching.

3.2 Strengthening the Cooperative Partnership With Universities

In 2003, Australian government released a report on "Australia's Teachers, Australia's Future", which clearly advocated strengthening the cooperative partnership between universities and elementary and secondary schools as well as enhancing beginning teachers' experience of reflecting on teaching practices. The report also lists internship subject, induction guidance and real teaching practice at the important stages of teachers' professional development. Under the guidance of such teacher education policy, the beginning teachers' induction in Australia also attaches importance to the links with universities, and actively builds partnerships with them. Based on this idea, since the 1990s, Australian government has carried out a large number of cooperation projects, among which the continuous implementation of "Innovative Contact Project between Universities and Elementary and Secondary Schools Based on the Development of Teachers", "A Project of Updating Teachers Based on Partnerships", "High-quality Teacher Project", and "Effective Program for Beginning Teachers" have served as an effective driving force for promoting beginning teachers' professional development and teaching ability. It is also worthy of noting that the principles of "Strong", "Real", and "Reliable" formulated by Australia based on the cooperative partnership with universities are of good continuity and are forward-looking. In order to make it more operational, the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations propose that we should establish a national teacher partnership foundation encompassing universities, elementary and secondary schools and experts. The foundation gives priorities on supporting universities and schools to improve educational practice, and it will evaluate the performance of partners on the basis of a sound assessment criteria. In this sense, the value orientation of the curriculum reform of Australia's teacher education emphasizes the partnerships among universities, schools, and related associations on the part of teachers who work as knowledge managers and learning guiders (Shen, 2009).

3.3 Actively Developing Online Induction

With the development of information technology, multimedia-aided teaching has become an important way

of teacher education. Especially in recent years, due to the influence of trainees' the quality, training venues, funding and other factors, the traditional teacher induction is difficult to meet the needs of beginning teachers, which further affect the development of beginning teachers' induction. Compared to traditional training, online training has flexibility, reproducibility, selectivity and diversity. Since online learning platform is conducive to the communication between teachers, this model has become a new trend in the future development of beginning teachers.

Australian government advocates online induction, and regard it as an important supplement to begin teachers' induction. With the assistance of the online learning community as well as of experienced teachers outside school, Australia opens online training courses, and carries out educational narrative research through BLOGs to develop teachers' reflective ability. Besides, online case training which is close to the specific problems and is full of typical examples is provided, coupled with forums for beginning teachers. All these have taken into account the different levels of beginning teachers and their training needs. They are provided for various types of courses, resources and learning tools (Xu, 2008). We can say that with the development of teacher education, the role of online induction has become increasingly evident.

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