Promising Practices

Pre-employment Training for New Teachers in Gyeong-gi Province in Korea

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Korea from 4-8 December 2017.

The OECD Review Team identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Context

Compared to other OECD countries, there is relatively little time devoted to practical experience as part of an initial teacher education (ITE) programme in Korea: typically four weeks in a 2-4 year course and 2 out of 51 credits (OECD, 2014[1]). Once new teachers have passed the Teachers’ Employment Examinations and are hired, responsibility for supporting new teachers rests with provincial offices of education (Dongguk University and Ministry of Education Korea, 2016[2]). Although induction is not mandated in Korea, on average, new teachers in Korea receive 50 hours of induction support (Dongguk University and Ministry of Education Korea, 2016[2]).

Gyeonggi province, which is located next to Seoul in north-western Korea, is the most populated province in Korea. It has nearly 800 000 students and 1 100 schools located in an area of more than 10 000 km². The Gyeonggi office of education has a strong focus on innovative education (or hyukshin), which prepares young people for the future and the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (see promising practices 1). Hyukshin is founded on the principle that “…everyone participates beyond the boundaries of the school to activate school-community education partnerships” (Gyeonggido Office of Education, 2017[3]). In order to strengthen the innovative capacity of schools, the office of education supports professional learning communities, reinforces educational leadership, provides training for teachers and parents, and promotes the innovative schools network. Beginning with a single school in 2000, the innovative schools network has spread to encompass 442 of the province’s schools. Almost all the other schools are “innovation empathy” schools that have adopted elements of the model and may become fully fledged innovation schools in the future (Gyeonggido Office of Education, 2017[3]).

The pre-employment training for new teachers in the province is critical to help bridge a potential gap between initial teacher education and the demands of teaching in the specific context of schools in Gyeonggi province and its innovative schools programme.

How does the Gyeonggi pre-employment training programme work?

The pre-employment programme consists of five days (35 hours) of training immediately before new teachers enter the classroom, followed by another 15 hours of face to face training after three to six months in schools. A further 15 hours of online training is provided throughout new teachers’ first year of employment.

The training programme is based heavily on practical preparation for the classroom and learning from the best teachers in the district. A particular need identified by new teachers is dealing with a diversity of students. The high level of competition for ITE places and
teaching jobs means that ITE graduates have been academically successful, and can have difficulty dealing with students who are less motivated and may have behavioural issues.

A strong feature of the induction programme is that they are designed and delivered by practicing teachers. Teachers from within the district are able to move between schools and training institutes, and a placement in the training institute can serve as part of a pathway into school leadership. According to those interviewed by the OECD review team at the Gyeonggi training institute, the starting point for course design is that “…if there is a problem in the field, the answer must be in the field”.

The focus on learning from experienced and accomplished teachers continues into the school. All new teachers have a mentor, who is selected not only for their skills and experience, but also for a match of subjects and year levels taught with the new teacher. Mentors are important in providing day to day support to new teachers, as they learn their craft in the classroom.

An advantage of having induction conducted by the province is that it is closely connected to practices in schools. Gyeonggi province has a strong emphasis on professional learning communities in schools. Interviewees reported that 70% of teachers in the province participate in these communities, which meet weekly to discuss research and problems of practice within a school. Gyeonggi is recognised as a leader in Korea in implementing this approach, which according to those interviewed is now becoming more widespread across the country.

Why is it a strength?

The OECD review team in its visit to Korea from 4-8 December 2017 recognised Gyeonggi’s approach as a strength because:

- **It focuses on the immediate needs of new teachers.** Initial teacher education in South Korea, especially for secondary teachers, tends to focus on content knowledge and educational theory. New teachers and those who work with them report that graduates are strong in these areas, and have a strong capacity to learn and adapt. However, they are less confident in areas such as classroom management and dealing with a diversity of learners. These are the focus of the pre-employment programme, with a strong emphasis on learning from experienced and skilled teachers.

- **It is heavily based in practice.** Following the abovementioned philosophy that “if there is a problem in the field, the answer must be in the field”, training programmes are largely designed and delivered by experienced teachers. In so doing, teachers draw on research so the connection to evidence is not lost. The practical focus is reinforced by the support provided within schools. New teachers work with a mentor and participate in professional learning communities within their school.

- **It has strong links to the provincial school improvement agenda.** Because induction is delivered by the provincial education office, preparation is specific to the schools in which new teachers are working. This is particularly important in Gyeonggi, which is leading the way in innovation in schools and the introduction of professional learning communities.
How could it be improved?

The OECD review team also noted that:

- *There is a disconnect between initial teacher education and induction.* The limited practical focus within ITE means that a great deal of focus is placed on developing practical classroom skills in a relatively limited time period. Some stakeholders reported that the five days of training before new teachers enter the classroom is insufficient. More school placements within ITE programmes would take some of the weight off the short time available for this training.

- *Resourcing and time remain a concern.* Like many school-based initiatives, the induction programme could be improved if new teachers and mentors could devote more time to it. New teachers interviewed by the team were positive about the programme. However, like new teachers the world over, they were experiencing “practice shock” and feeling time poor amongst the range of demands of the job.

For more information

