

The First Step to Becoming a Kindergarten Teacher: Difficulties and Challenges

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Abstract

After finalising formal training, the first year in the field of teaching is a year of great expectations and anticipation on the side of the novice teachers, as well as experiencing nervousness and lack of confidence. The literature addresses this subject from the aspect of teachers in school, where it has been found that this first year represents a period of challenges, dilemmas and difficulties. Little though has been written from the aspect of kindergarten teachers. The authors assume that novice kindergarten teachers face similar experiences. During this first year, it is obligatory for the novice kindergarten teachers to attend a professional development workshop. The aim of the workshop is to provide a significant support system for the novice teacher in this challenging year.

The aim of this research was to examine the novice kindergarten's dilemmas and challenges during this critical first year and their attitudes towards the professional development workshop concerning the relevance of the workshop in assisting the kindergarten teachers in dealing and coping with the dilemmas that arose from the field.

The findings indicate that the novice kindergarten teachers experience similar dilemmas in their first year in the field as do teachers. It was also found that the workshop was not a significant factor in helping the novice kindergarten teachers cope with this challenging experience. This leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to re-evaluate this framework in order to make it a place of significance for the novice kindergarten teachers.

Keywords: *Novice kindergarten teachers: Professional Development workshop:*

1. Introduction

The induction of new teachers into the field represents a period of great expectations, for the student teachers of themselves and of their future employees. The students expect to be significant to their pupils and to their future work place. In reality, the transition from student teacher to new teacher, or in-service teacher, is a period fraught with tension, anxiety and learning through trial and error. First year teachers are expected to “hit the ground running”. In fact, the statistics show that 10% of them will not return after their first year, with the number increasing to almost half in the first five years (Kaiser, 2011). There is limited research that investigates this process in the sector of kindergarten teachers (Oplatka, I& Eisenberg, M. 2006). The assumption of the writers being that the induction process and the professional development of kindergarten teachers are similar to that of primary and high school teachers.

This article will be investigating the process of training, especially the obligatory workshop, that is part of the professional development of kindergarten teachers in Israel in their first year of working as kindergarten teachers in Israel.

2. Kindergarten Teachers’ Training in Israel

In Israel, a kindergarten teacher will train in a teachers’ training college or university for four years and receive at the end of this time, a first degree with a licence to teach. During the four years, her training includes theoretical studies and practical experience. At the end of the four years she is expected to sign on for additional courses that are organised by the ministry of education. Every year, each kindergarten teacher has to complete 60 hours of courses that will expand her professional knowledge.

<http://edu.gov.il/owlheb/Pages/default.aspx>

During the period of training in college, the students acquire theoretical and practical knowledge through their practicum. The period of practice is often described as being the most significant for the student in the building up of their professional identity (Dan, 2012). The aim of the practical experience is to prepare them for their induction period.

3. Model of Kindergarten Teachers Training In Israel

98 Hours of Accreditation –Practical and Theoretical Knowledge

The following figure illustrates the division between theoretical studies and practicum in the training program for (or kindergarden?) kindergarten teachers who train for their profession in a teacher training college.

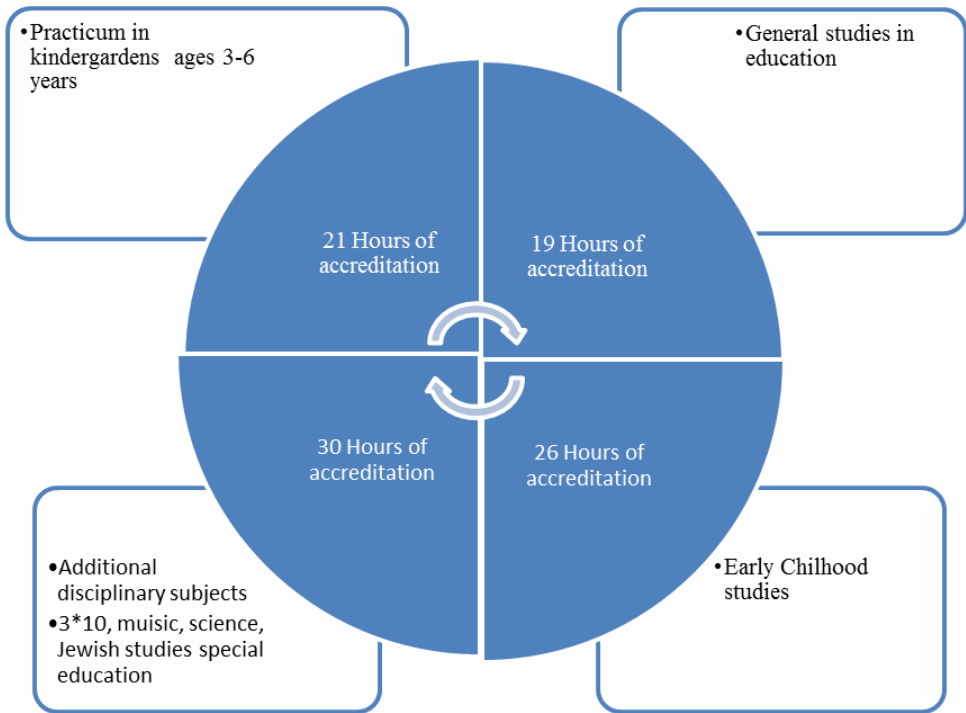


Figure :1 Division between theoretical studies and practicum in Kindergarten teacher's training program.

Figure 1. Shows division between theoretical studies and practicum in Kindergarten teacher's training program

The stage of induction, the entrance into the profession, consists of a year of “internment” followed by two years in the field after the initial first year. This period of time often constitutes a time of great difficulties as well as a lack of self-confidence or self-efficacy (Dan, 2012). The experiences that the novice kindergarten teacher encounters in the first year effect her motivation for wanting to continue in this profession. A successful period of induction will positively affect the new kindergarten teacher's professional identity and aid in lowering the future attrition of kindergarten teachers.

The role of kindergarten teachers is complex, demanding knowledge in child development, management, disciplinary subjects, first aid, pedagogical knowledge of each stage in a child's development, knowledge in the building of a curriculum, knowledge in identifying children with special needs and how to enter into a significant dialogue with parents. In addition, the hours are long and there are no additional professional adult staff with whom the kindergarten teacher can consult in the process of decision making during the day's activities. The kindergarten auxiliary staff do not have the same professional training as the

kindergarten teacher and very often have held their position for a number of years before the novice kindergarten teacher starts her induction period. The quality of the team work between the kindergarten teacher and her staff can play a major role in the feelings of professional competency for the novice kindergarten teacher (Oplatka, I& Eisenberg, M. 2006). In time, if the kindergarten teacher remains in the profession, she attains a level of confidence coupled with maturity that comes with increased experience and thus her professional work reaches a higher level. In addition and unique to this system, a kindergarten teacher is considered the “kindergarten manager” from her first year. In most professions, one achieves the level of management after years of experience, after one's work is recognized and appreciated by one's superiors.

Kindergarten teachers are expected to act as educational leaders and experts on preschool education. Their main objectives include the management of the kindergarten staff, implementing change, possessing innovation, organizing the day-to-day pedagogical activities and encouraging children's play, all within a positive atmosphere.

<http://edu.gov.il/minhalpedagogy/preschool/Pages/preschool-education.aspx>.

4. Difficulties of New Teachers

Before actually practicing teaching, the impressions one has of teaching are based on previous subjective experiences of what it is to be a teacher and very often there is a "reality shock" (Weinstein, 1988). According to the literature, the experiences of the new teacher in her first year of teaching determine the concepts and beliefs of what it means to be a teacher, what teaching is, who the pupils are and what the school environment comprises (Gold, 1996; Gratch, 1998). In addition, a link has been found between the early experiences of new teachers and their ability to continue as teachers and to develop in their profession (Chapman & Green, 1986). The development of the teacher includes three stages:

Preservice - as a student teacher.

Induction - the first years of teaching.

In-service - experienced teacher.

The induction stage has been described as being the most difficult of all stages. The difficulties that were indicated by the new teachers included:

Class discipline, motivation of the pupils, different needs of the pupils, relationships with parents, evaluation of the pupils, stress and a large number of tasks to be completed, the knowledge needed to teach disciplinary subjects..... and many others (Veenman, 1984). According to Heath-Camp and Camp (1990), the difficulties addressed three areas, the school policies, the students (behaviour) and internal struggles (self-

confidence, time management and organizational skills). The ability to survive depends on the support systems or the barriers that are erected during these first years.

To become a teacher or a kindergarten teacher involves a process that requires the tenacity and understanding that the process is complex and can take years. To become a kindergarten teacher, who is proficient and confident in her work, demands challenging previous belief systems and realising that the first few years are also part of one's initial training.

The significance of this research is to address the training that student teachers undergo, specifically the professional workshop that is obligatory in the first year in the field after the completion of their professional training in college.

5. Methodology

The research was conducted in a teacher training college in the north of Israel. The research population consisted of 38 female students who are in their fourth year of training for their teacher's license and participate once a week in a professional workshop under the auspices of the college as part of the accreditation process.

The research was a pilot research designed to examine the effectiveness of the workshop in providing a significant framework for the novice students at the critical stage of their training,

The students were requested to fill in a questionnaire at the beginning of their session, three months after the beginning of the school year. The questionnaire consisted of general questions that related to the kindergarten, for example, the number of children in the kindergarten, the type of kindergarten, secular or religious. The questionnaire also consisted of questions that related to the effectiveness of the workshop as a significant framework for addressing their needs in this critical year in their professional development.

6. Findings

The initial results indicated as follows:

- 1.The students indicated that the workshop did not fully address their needs which arose from difficulties and challenges from their experiences in the field.
- 2.The greater the difficulties the student encountered in the field, the less effective the assistance they received from the workshop.

3. The most significant difficulties that were indicated were in the areas of management of the kindergarten and teaching diverse groups of children.

Most of the students indicated that they see the profession of teaching as a "mission" and expressed a high level of motivation to succeed in their chosen profession. A small number indicated that they consider leaving the profession.

The students reported a high level of self-ability and consider teaching to be a high status profession equal to medicine or psychology.

7. Conclusions

The first year in the professional life of a kindergarten teacher is challenging and beset with dilemmas. To enable the novice kindergarten teachers to succeed at this critical stage, it is essential that they receive an effective support system. As a consequence of this research, it is essential that the workshop framework that has been provided for this purpose undergoes reevaluation in its effectiveness in fulfilling the novice kindergarten teachers' emotional and professional needs.

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