



Abstracts

"Tango" between careful planning and "letting go" in a large-scale pedagogical change: Reflections on implementing the civic Performance Assessment Inquiry Task (PAIT)

Adar Cohen, Anat Zohar

Pedagogical changes in learning, instruction, and assessment take place in numerous countries, including Israel. However, most of these pedagogical changes succeed on a small scale, while sustainable large-scale changes are incredibly challenging. Educational practitioners and researchers alike are still debating the factors that support wide-scale implementation of innovative pedagogical improvement. This paper examines a specific case of a system-wide pedagogical change that took place in Israel between 2007 and 2012: the implementation of PAIT as a vehicle for meaningful learning and alternative assessment in civic education. The authors present three main factors that helped (according to their understanding) to support the implementation process: meticulous pedagogical planning; wide-scale professional development, and granting autonomy to practitioners on all levels. Even though meticulous planning on the one hand and granting autonomy on the other may seem contradictory, the analysis presented in this paper indicates that finding the right balance between these two seemingly opposites is the key to successful implementation. The findings show that such a balance can support a coherent top-down pedagogical goal while also leaving sufficient space for practitioners' bottom-up creativity and independent initiatives. This balance enables practitioners on all levels to see themselves as partners who identify with the change process, thereby contributing to its successful implementation. Among other things, success is supported by the participants' ability to adapt "top down" changes to the diverse and contextualized environments in which they are working. The paper ends with practical recommendations for policymakers who are about to lead wide-scale pedagogical changes.

Keywords: civic studies, instructional reform, teachers' autonomy, wide-scale implementation.

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Processes of uncertainty in learning for understanding

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The present study focuses on the emotional responses of student-teachers when contending with a challenging learning task. Emotional processes directly associated with learning that takes learners away from their place in the present regarding the studied material are termed "processes of uncertainty". The study participants were 28 student-educators attending academic courses between 2009 and 2011. They were asked to perform a task that constituted an introduction to learning the subject of "day and night" in accordance with the Thinking Journey method. While performing the task the students were asked to complete a questionnaire and describe the emotional processes they were experiencing. They expressed a wide range of emotions, positive and negative. In this regard, they expressed negative emotions such as fear and anxiety, and positive emotions such as curiosity and sense of challenge. From the content and lexical analyses, it emerges that the challenge posed by the task amplified the learners' sense of uncertainty. The study also found that uncertainty and embarrassment played an important role in creating learning processes and understanding the concept presented in the task. The study also presents the mediator's significant role in knowledge construction processes, wherein the learner simultaneously needs both cognitive and emotional support. The mediator had to contain the learners' feelings of uncertainty, and support their cognitive construction process and change in perception by enabling them to experience a meaningful, quality, and personal construction process of the studied subject. The present study contributes to an understanding of the processes of uncertainty experienced by learners during meaningful learning for understanding.

Keywords: learning for understanding, mediation, processes of uncertainty, Thinking Journey method.

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Examining the contribution of teaching and learning to elementary school students' achievements

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Meaningful learning is characterized by active student-centered involvement. The relevant discourse includes much discussion regarding types of learning, but does not examine their contribution to student achievement. The purpose of the study described in this article was to examine the contribution of three types of learning to elementary school students' achievements. The study was carried out among 68 fifth-grade students in northern Israel. The students took a pre-test in zoology, then participated in an alternative learning experience – traditional learning (teacher-centered, the teacher passing on knowledge to the students), project-based learning (student-centered, the learning products reflect the learning process), and combined learning (combining the first two types). At the end of the study unit in zoology the students took a post-test. The findings show that the students engaged in project-based learning and combined learning (two types of meaningful learning) demonstrated significantly higher achievements than those engaged in traditional learning.

The present study demonstrates that it is possible to perceive student achievement as an additional way of evaluating teaching and learning models, i.e., examining the 'efficiency of the models based on their contribution to student achievement. This encourages the pedagogical staff in schools to examine basic aspects of teaching in different ways (such as constructing a teaching plan that defines ways of achieving the desired results), particularly focusing on the choice of type of teaching.

Keywords: combined learning, pedagogical management, project based learning, traditional learning.

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Experience versus expertise: What an expert teacher says?

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In March 2008 an agreement was signed between the Israel Teachers Union and the government to inaugurate an educational reform package called Ofek Hadash (New Horizon). The purpose of the program was to institute educational and professional changes in elementary and junior high schools in Israel. Among other points, the agreement defined levels of professional advancement for teachers, establishing a scale from 1 to 9; levels 7 to 9 were defined as "expert level". Teachers who wished to reach the rank of expert were required to take special courses. This article presents one aspect of a broader study focusing on the perceptions of teachers (who attended courses for the higher rankings) regarding their expertise in teaching. Based on the findings from this and other studies, along with the accepted definitions of researchers in education, I have formulated nine qualities that distinguish between an expert teacher and an experienced teacher. Teachers in the study described in this article related to only five of these. It should be noted that they saw experience in teaching as a wide-ranging concept, in contrast with the efforts of education researchers to break it down into specific factors, namely, accumulated knowledge, personal theories, and practical insights.

It would appear that teachers' perception of expertise in teaching is primarily intuitive, and that they lack awareness of certain aspects of the concept. As a result, they do not draw a precise distinction between a longtime, experienced teacher and an expert teacher. Identifying and modeling the full range of components that make up expertise in teaching can enable teachers to define the concept for themselves, display respect for their experience as teachers, which they see as the most significant aspect of their expertise, and help build a path toward personal progress.

Keywords: expert teacher, expertise in teaching, professional development.

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Links between two close contexts, home and school, and their effect on adolescents' school functioning in Israel

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Earlier studies indicated links between parents' educational involvement and students' self-evaluation and academic achievements. Therefore, researchers and educators seek to better understand the motivations of parents' educational involvement. In the present study students' perceptions of classroom climate were examined as a predictor of parents' educational involvement. Data was collected from 517 (245 girls and 272 boys) Israeli eighth-graders (second year of junior high school). The students reported on classroom climate, parents' educational involvement, and self-evaluation. Schools reported on academic achievement (grades). Analyses using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) showed a satisfactory fit of the empirical model to the theoretical model.

Model analysis for boys and girls separately indicated positive relations for boys and girls between home-based parental involvement and global self-worth, and links between parental knowledge and self-evaluation (positive for girls and negative for boys). Furthermore, for boys only there were positive relations between school-based parental involvement and global self-worth and academic self-evaluation.

Keywords: adolescents' school functioning, classroom climate, gender differences, parents' involvement.

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Online workshop versus "face-to-face" workshop during the induction phase

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This article focuses on a comparison between an online workshop and a "face-to-face" workshop at the induction phase. The aim of this article is to examine the attitudes of teacher interns participating in online workshops, hybrid workshops, and face-to-face workshops to e-learning, to understand the workshop's contribution to them, and to identify the relevant implications for integration into teaching and the nature of training required. In the study described in this paper, questionnaires were distributed to 251 interns. The findings indicate a connection between the type of workshop and the type of contribution (emotional, pedagogical, practical) to its participants. In addition, the type of workshop in which the interns participate influences the differences between them in understanding the objectives of the workshop, the role of the facilitator, and the important components of the workshop. The findings show that it is very important to discuss the type of training given to trainee teachers in the digital-technological era, and its impact on the quality of teaching in Israel.

Keywords: induction, online teaching, professional competence, teaching workshop.

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The contribution of personal resources and Internet use in predicting the loneliness of education students with and without LD or ADHD

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The goal of this study was to explore the contribution of personal resources and Internet use in predicting loneliness in college students with and without LD or ADHD. Participants included 180 female students studying special education at a teachers' college in central Israel: 62 students with LD, ADHD, or both, and 118 students without any diagnosed disability. Five questionnaires assessed loneliness, hope, self-efficacy, sense of coherence, and different types of Internet use (e.g., for activities and social involvement, for pleasure, or "escaping from reality"). Results indicated that students with LD or ADHD reported higher levels of loneliness and lower levels of hope, self-efficacy, and sense of coherence than students without a disability. Moreover, students with LD or ADHD use the Internet to increase their social involvement, relaxation, and "escaping from reality" more than their peers without disabilities. They also perceive the Internet as weakening social ties. Multiple regression analyses revealed a unique contribution of sense of coherence for both groups (with and without disabilities). A unique and different contribution of each type of Internet use was found in predicting the students' loneliness in each group.

Keywords: internet communication, loneliness, personal resources, self-efficacy, student teachers with and without LD or ADHD.

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Teacher mentors describe the characteristics of the professional training of teachers

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The article examines teachers' mentors' perceptions of the characteristics and objectives of the professional training of teachers, and outlines the desired portrait and functions of mentors. The study is based on the principles of the qualitative approach, whereby each participant in the study can express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings on issues related to the subject. The research tool is a semi-structured ethnographic interview, and analysis of the findings is based on the grounded theory approach.

The findings of the study indicate that the teacher mentors believe that teachers' professional training has two main goals: (a) creating change in the professional development of teachers, and (b) providing emotional support for teachers. The mentors note several difficulties in the training process, the main ones being lack of cooperation by some teachers and principals with the mentor, and therefore no change in the teaching work, contradictory and vague Ministry of Education requirements, and conditions that are unsuitable for training. As for the training outcomes, the mentors note a change and improvement in the teaching methods of some of the instructors, and an improvement in the students' achievements. Two main conclusions emerge from the study: (a) All those involved in the training activities – principals, mentors, teachers – must be strengthened, and (b) there is a connection between the school climate and the principals' perception of the necessity and success of training.

Keywords: mentor, professional training of teachers, school climate, teacher training methods.

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