**Absorption of Retrained Hi-Tech Workers in Education**

Report on In-Depth Studies

**Summarized Findings and Conclusions**

1. A high level of variance characterizes the encounter between the retrained mathematics teachers who participated in this study and the schools in which they were placed. From the retrainees’ side, there are more than a few stories of unsuccessful absorption that led to suffering and disillusionment, leading the retrainee to leave the school (in most cases for another school). There are also stories, though fewer in number, of successful and satisfying absorption creating a sense of belonging among the retrainees to their new workplace and reinforcing their confidence that their decision to retrain for education was the right one.
2. For most retrainees, the character and success of absorption appear to be the product of a direct encounter between their needs and expectations of the absorbing school and the schools’ largely undeclared assumptions and expectations regarding the retrainees who sought to be absorbed.
3. The hi-tech world from which most of the retrainees came is totally different to the typical school in terms of its organizational culture, the attitude toward workers as a precious and import asset and resource, working procedures, remuneration, and the character of the positions it includes. For the most part, the hi-tech world is perceived as more highly developed, rich in resources, and prestigious. Retrainees from the standing army are perceived as coming from a system that is closer in its character to the education system, albeit one that is stronger and wealthier.
4. Most retrainees arrive in education due to their sense that they have exhausted the possibilities of their previous position. In most cases, this includes a sense of accomplishment and success in their activities to date, combined with a feeling of a lack of additional meaning. They believe that teaching offers the potential for self-realization and embodies a social and value-based mission. This conviction is reinforced by the substantial reduction in salary that awaits them in their new field. In some cases, teaching mathematics at a high level is their ultimate aspiration from this point forward, while in others they hope to reach positions of management and influence in the school and in the education system as a whole. A minority of the retrainees arrive with a sense of failure in their previous profession, burnout, or a desire for a more comfortable and relatively less demanding framework for their remaining years through to retirement.
5. Most of the retrainees argue that the preparation they underwent was inadequate, with too much theory and too little practice. This is particularly true in terms of the capacity of the training to prepare them for what awaits them in school and to provide an opportunity to experience difficulties that are as similar as possible to those in the field.
6. The main needs and expectations of most of the retrainees regarding the schools include receiving detailed information about how to function in the school where they find themselves. This includes such aspects as bureaucratic procedures for receiving salaries; assistance and guidance relating to the content of the subject they have studied; lesson plans and so forth; and the dynamic management of the class from the first encounter with the students through to shaping the retrainee’s approach to teaching and acquiring ancillary skills. Class management is perceived as the hardest and most problematic aspect as the retrainees take their first steps. They encounter difficulties that are often accompanied by a powerful new experience, a sense of loneliness, and a need for support, guidance, and encouragement. These should be provided through hands-on guidance and supervision, though they are not always found in the absorbing schools. In particular there is a need to observe the retrainees as they teach in the classroom and to offer corrective and guiding feedback. The retrainees also expect to receive attention and direction from the senior staff at the school, and in particular from the principal and the subject coordinator. They expect that these functions will take into consideration the retrainees’ desires regarding the positions they will or will not fill in the school and will create a sympathetic environment for them among the teaching staff as a whole, and among the mathematics teachers in particular.
7. The retrainees are particularly anxious regarding their first encounter or encounters with the students. They see this as a kind of “baptism by fire” – an experience they have had very little real practice with, and a true, frightening, and potentially crucial test regarding their new vocation. The reason for this is they fundamentally perceive the students as undisciplined; even in schools that are considered relatively sympathetic toward the retrainees, they feel that the school is not in full control of the students. Despite the limited ability of the school to intervene in this respect, the retrainees nevertheless expect that they will do the best they can to make their first steps easier, including support as necessary with students and parents.
8. For a minority of schools, the basic assumption regarding the absorption of the retrainees is that in addition to solving the specific problem of a shortage of suitable mathematics teachers, this process also offers an opportunity to strengthen the school through an addition of high-quality and advanced staff members. Accordingly, these schools believe that they have an obligation to help in the absorption of the retrainees they accept, to encourage them to grow and develop in the school, and to enable them to contribute to the development of the school. A larger number of schools claim that there is a gulf between what should have been done to facilitate the retrainees’ successful absorption and what as possible given the school’s resources and the everyday pressures it faces. These schools expect that the retrainees will make up for most of this gulf by themselves; help the school by showing consideration for the constraints it faces in offering or not offering help; and do the best they can to solve these problems (an example is the chronic shortage of class educators). Other schools see the retrainees ‘expectation to receive assistance, help, and tangible consideration of their needs as evidence of a fundamental misunderstanding on their part. These schools argue that the opportunity the retrainees have been given, as beginners who lack experience, constitutes a real achievement for them. The retrainees should accept what they are given without arguments and complaints; learn how to survive and operate in the hectic and pressured organizational world of the school; and allow the school to use them as an available and convenient resource according to the school’s needs and its sole discretion.
9. The system and the absorption procedures offered by the schools to the retrainees they absorb largely reflect the basic assumptions discussed in the previous section. A minority of schools have clear and orderly policies and systems for absorption that meet most of the retrainees’ needs as described above. Some schools maintain a positive atmosphere and approach toward the retrainees and/or a relaxed and accepting organizational culture in general that includes the retrainees. These characteristics are reflected in certain absorption procedures and components whose quality reflects the school’s constraints and resources, together with sensitivity on the part of the relevant functions regarding this matter. In a considerable number of schools, there are only one or two absorption components, of varying quality, while the organizational climate is alienated, competitive, and sometimes even aggressive – features that are particularly directed toward new teachers.
10. In terms of the frequency and quality of the de facto absorption procedures and components found in the schools, it appears that guidance and supervision of retrainees is confined mainly to the specific subject, and must less to the dimension of the dynamic process of class management, including observation of the retrainee teacher at work and the provision of feedback focusing on this. Many of the instructors and supervisors appointed by the schools for this purpose are teachers who lack the motivation and/or knowledge to perform this function. Most of the school principals are only involved in actions with the retrainee from a distance. Among mathematics coordinators a high level of variance can be seen in terms of the extent and character of the support and direction they provide for the retrainee. This aspect is not always directly related to the approach of the school as a whole in this respect. In a fair number of schools, no consideration is shown regarding the difficult first encounter between the retrainee and the students in such aspects as selecting the class to be taught by the retrainee; preparing the class for the encounter with the retrainee; and supporting the retrainees in the case of complaints – justified or otherwise – raised by students and parents during this sensitive initial orientation period in the new setting. In many cases, the retrainees face pressure to accept additional functions quickly, particularly as class educators, even when they are not interested in these functions – at least in this initial stage. In some cases this pressure takes the form of a suggestion; in others it is a demand. General information about the school and about the new retrainees’ new function is conspicuous in its absence, as is training and guidance in the complex procedures involved in obtaining their salary from the Ministry of Education.
11. In light of the unsubstantial and weak character of the structured absorption means offered to retrainees in many schools, their de facto absorption takes place through the unmediated encounter between both sides of the “baggage” they bring with them: their needs, expectations, and preexisting assumptions regarding the desirable course of absorption. The typical relationship that emerges against the background of these gaps usually leads to diametrically opposed opinions on the question as to which side is supposed to adapt itself to the other’s needs and expectations, and to what extent. A minority of schools feel that they must shoulder most of the burden in the process of mutual adaptation, but most impose this on the retrainees themselves, in varying degrees of severity. The power relations embodied in this process embody a double-edged imbalance. The retrainees arrive in the stronger position in terms of the status and prestige of their former positions and of the world form which they came, but weaker in terms of their status as beginners in a new and alien system. The relevant functions in the school, with the authority and power available to them, represent a more backward, deprived, and weak system than the one from which the retrainees came. This double imbalance influences and is influenced by the actual interaction between the two sides. In most cases, it is translated into relatively forceful behavior on the part of the school, with the goal of dictating to the trainee a form of absorption based on the school’s needs, while obscuring or eliminating their perceived status, prestige, and managerial experience in their former positions. The relative rare exceptions to this pattern, resulting in successful absorption stories, are found when self-confident schools seek to build themselves with the help of the new high-quality staff, and translate this into a particularly well-developed absorption system. Similarly, other success stories include particularly strong retrainees, who arrive at the school with a strong self-image, are able to cause the school to accept them on their own terms from the outset, or trainees who overcome the initial difficulties and quasi-alienation of the school in terms of their needs and are nevertheless absorbed in their new workforce. As noted, all these examples constitute a minority.
12. Accordingly, the typical retrainee can be described as a “new immigrant” who has moved from a wealthier country and class to a promised land that is less developed. The newcomers expect to receive a generous “relocation package” that will help them settle and prosper for their own sake and that of their new home, but in reality find themselves in the position of immigrants who arrive in the new land and are forced to bear the full burden survival. Their former achievements are almost completely irrelevant now. The result is that even if the newcomers do not ultimately quit their new home and return to the place they came from, they usually become much less involved citizens and much less satisfied and productive than before. In our instance, this results in a disappointed, hurt teacher preoccupied by the struggle for survival. Instead of giving to and taking from their new workplace, the newcomer adopts a deliberately low profile, perceiving this as the expected way of life in their new home.
13. This study included an examination on a limited scope of the Hotam program, which works to recruit and retrain young graduates for work in teaching. It emerged that the program offers a model that could be used to identity ideas for the systemic and full structuring of the absorption process for retrainees in schools. This includes creating a clear contract between all those involved in absorbing the retrainee and ensuring the presence of procedures and means that meet their key needs during the absorption phase. The fact that Hotam focuses solely on recruiting young graduates, and places a very extreme emphasis on the social mission dimension of retraining for teachers, reduces the potential to extrapolate aspects of this framework in the case of the “regular” retrainees who formed the focus of our study, but by no means eliminates this potential. We recommend that this aspect be examined on a broader and more systemic basis than was the case in this study.