Acquisition of Professional Language and Formation of Creative-Professional Identity:

Principles and Processes in the Training of Kindergarten Teachers in the Creative Education Track

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Abstract

This article presents a study conducted among the pedagogical instructors of the Creativity in Early Education track at the Kibbutzim College in Israel. Participants include female students, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school teachers, all of whom were graduates of this educational track. The study examined the retrospective and reflective point of view among instructors of this training process. This enabled them to examine the training processes that they conduct, and provided an opportunity for them to formulate and conceptualize the training model used in this educational track. The study findings indicate that the original principles of the training process, which were developed forty years ago by the founders of this educational track as led by Sarah Shapir, have been maintained in the current training model, despite systemic changes over the years. These principles form the basis for the development of a personal, professional, and creative identity among its students. The process was found to contribute to the acquisition of a language and educational approach to creativity, to affect the self-perception and self-awareness of education students and kindergarten or elementary school teachers, and help them to understand their educational worldview. The training model that emerged from the research findings is characterized by three main axes: multidirectional learning, visual-conceptual tools, and connections. These occur in three primary arenas: the practicum in kindergartens, various arts courses withing the training program, and the pedagogical instruction that integrates all parts of the educational track. The model detailed in this article makes theoretical and empirical contributions to knowledge about training processes among students of early childhood education.

Introduction

The Creativity in Early Education track at the Kibbutzim College of Education in Israel was established in 1978 by several of the college’s lecturers, led by Sara Shapir. This was a unique training course in Israel. It was established as separate from the early education track, and was designed for students who choose to integrate arts and creativity into their learning and teaching.

Cultivating creativity presents one of the most interesting challenges for any teacher, as it involves understanding the true dynamics of creative work. In this educational track, personal choice is seen as key to the development of a creative individual. But this is not its only core principle. From its development until present times, this track has integrated the creative ethos into education, through the arts such as theater, movement, music, visual arts (Shapir, Aner & Farber, 1995); in multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1996) which are reflected in educational practice (Landau, 2001; Robinson 2016); and parallel processes in training and in the field.

According to the perspective of this track, educators are the key figures in the educational endeavor, and therefore need in-depth understanding so that they can rely on their foundation of abilities when interacting with children and adults (Avinon, 2014; Klein Vivlon, 2008). To this end, training in the Creativity in Early Education track simultaneously sharpens students’ awareness of their own multiple intelligences, supports the strengthening and development of their creativity, and helps them encourage children’s wonder of discovery, play, learning, social interconnection, and the development of interrelated skills into a unique fabric that characterizes this developmental stage. At the same time, the training develops participants’ ability to allow themselves and the children to express themselves in multifaceted ways, for teachers to have in-depth understanding of young children, and to develop sensitivity, caring, and empathy. This training is in line with the principles of educator and feminist Nell Noddings (2012), who states that creating a climate in which caring relationships can occur should be a goal of all teachers and educational policy makers. Noddings states her hope that caring teachers can help their students enter the adult world as people who are concerned about and care for others.

Over the years, training in the Creativity in Early Education track has been conducted as a tradition that was passed down verbally, according to the principles established by its founders (see below). Each new pedagogical instructor who entered this track received guidance and mentorship from the veteran instructors, and learned from them the secrets of its educational and teaching methods. New lecturers who entered the track received guidance and instruction from the heads of the department and the instructors, based on the same principles. Over the years, although some practical materials have been written and the training processes have been documented, no empirical research has been conducted. Further, no theoretical material has been written that presents the training processes for creativity in early childhood education in general or the Creativity in Early Education track at the Kibbutzim College in particular.

Several years ago, the Kibbutzim College underwent a systemic change, and transformed its early education track into a full department, consisting of three tracks: creative education, a dialogical approach, and special education for preschoolers. This systemic change led to retrospective, reflective observations among the pedagogical instructors of the creative education track regarding its training processes. This change enabled them to assess the training processes that they carry out, and provided an opportunity for crystallization and conceptualization, which led to empirical research (described below). The current study, conducted by the six pedagogical instructors of this track and the head of the early childhood education department, examined the creative training processes, as reflected in the testimonies of students and alumni.

The findings indicate that the principles of the track’s founders and the processes used in it have been crystallized into a model. The model includes the ways of acquiring a language of creativity at the various stages of training, the processes of developing professional identity among creative education teachers, and application of the language and identity by alumni in their work in kindergartens and elementary schools. This article presents the topic of creativity in the field of education, student testimonies from interviews, and a training model that emerged from the research findings. In this respect, this article fills in gaps in the research and traces the crystallization of a language of creativity and the professional identity of teacher-trainees in the Creativity in Early Education track.