**From ideology to social justice in the classroom among second-career student teachers**

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**Abstract**

Teachers are key to educational and social change in schools. They effect this via curriculum planning processes. This study examines the motivations of student teachers who have chosen education as a second career and how they seek to translate their perceptions into classroom practices. The research data are based on research work and interviews with 22 student teachers studying in a training model primarily consisting of clinical experience. The results show that their goal is to improve the children's social and educational circumstances through social remediation practices including grading and differentiation, teaching and learning methods, classroom climate and teacher-student relations, assessment of student achievement and organization of the learning environment. Under suitable conditions, these methods can make a significant difference.

**Theoretical framework**

The motives for choosing professional retraining for teaching are a subject of great interest to researchers (Lamport & Lee, 2011). The literature documents three main types of motives for selecting teaching as a career: (a) altruistic– characterized by the need to advance children and contribute to societal improvement (Richardson & Watt, 2005; Theriot, 2007); (b) intrinsic– an expression of the need to derive “spiritual” benefit from the profession e.g. pleasure, interest or realization of creativity; (c) extracurricular– engaging in producing material benefits, such as comfortable working conditions and job security. In Chambers' study (2002), the main reason for choosing teaching as a second career was altruism. In the 21st century, studies indicate a tendency to choose teaching as a second career to benefit children and adolescents in a multi-cultural societal context (Wagner & Imanuel-Noy, 2014; Sinclair, 2008).

*The teacher as a curriculum planner*

These motives reflect the educational perception of student-teachers. Teachers' ideologies are the main drivers of change (Richardson, 1994). In a study examining teachers' approaches to curriculum planning processes, a sequence of three strategies was presented, mapping involvement in the process from passive to independent: teachers who "transmit the curriculum" word for word (Curriculum Transmitters), teachers as "curriculum developers" who adapt material to fit the circumstances of the curriculum (Curriculum Developers) and teachers as "curriculum designers" (Curriculum Makers) (Shawer, 2010). Another concept prevalent in recent years in training teachers for curriculum planning is that of the "teacher as researcher." According to this approach, the teacher is a reflective professional who observes and thinks about their activities and work, deals with difficulties and ambiguities in complex situations and offers solutions after reflective thinking. The teacher as researcher is capable of making changes to their work and self-evaluating. In this approach, teachers are instructed to conduct "active research" that will enable them to develop professionally—to understand their practice—but also contribute to the creation of knowledge (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, Salberg, 2011). Similarly, some see training teachers as curriculum planners in order to form an important bridge between education policy and practice, so that teachers' professional independence is preserved. Researchers Grimmett & Chinnery (2009) also call for teachers' autonomous status and pedagogical independence to be strengthened in the practical space, which is driven by their professional sense of mission. In other words, teacher participation in curriculum planning plays a central role in their professional empowerment. Ben-Peretz (1995) describes this as a continuum. On one extreme of the continuum are "teachers as the sails of the curriculum"; she uses the term "curricular potential" to express the ability to analyze and interpret the curriculum. In the center of Ben Peretz's continuum is the "teacher as a bridge between education policy and actual teaching," and at its opposite extreme are "teachers as curriculum critics for social justice," i.e. teachers who are agents of change, whose role is to actively work for social justice. In the area of Critical Theory, Gyroux (1989) and Apple (1982) view the educational system as a factor that preserves an unequal political, social, economic and cultural reality via institutional structures and the curriculum. Cochrane-Smith (2008) also argues that teaching and teacher training are political and ideological activities that by their very nature include ideas of principles and the use of force. Gyroux (1988) argues that teachers should be "intellectuals who change reality." In Finland, for example, curriculum design is the responsibility of teachers, schools and local authorities—not the state. The teacher is an autonomous expert in the construction of the curriculum, without supervision (Salberg, 2011).

*Curriculum planning and justice*

The basic assumption is that the education system should act as an agent of social justice, distributing resources according to the principles of justice—equality, need and fairness. However, in practice, the education system may promote or maintain a state of inequality within the school, based on ethnic groups, socio-economic status, nationality, gender etc. (Okin, 1989). Furthermore, even when there is agreement regarding the principles of justice guiding the distribution of resources, individuals may not feel that there is a fair distribution and at times may feel a sense of injustice and deprivation (Sabbagh & Biberman, 2014).

In terms of macro level resources (e.g. the right to education) and micro resources (such as the provision of grades), while some of these cannot be influenced by teachers, others can and to a large degree. In terms of the contents of the curriculum, some believe that implementing a hegemonic curriculum favours established groups, and that instead the teacher must formulate a "common law curriculum" (Connell, 1993). Thus, depending on their perceptions and the contexts in which they operate, teachers may develop pedagogic practices to achieve social justice (McDonough & Feinberg, 2003).

**Aim of the research**

The aim of this study is to examine the views of second-career teachers, their place in the curriculum planning process, their interpretation of the school reality and how these are translated into classroom practices.

**Context**

The study was conducted in the context of the "second teacher in the classroom" concept, which has been developing world-wide for over a decade. Its aim is to change the teacher training process based on the assumption that academic institutions for teacher training must be attentive and relevant to the needs of educational reality. In Israel, the program is in its third year of implementation. In this model, referred to as "academia-classroom," training processes are field-focused, students spending three days a week on classroom experience. They are joined by veteran teachers for co-teaching. The theoretical studies are conducted in a concentrated manner with seven full days of study scattered throughout the year and guided self-study.

**Study participants**

This was the second year in which the Levinsky College had implemented the model of the "Academia-Classroom" partnership within the framework of the M.Teach studies (a Master's degree to convert academics to teachers). The research population in the college totaled around 100 students. Data were collected using a purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998) of 22 students who were studying in the first year in a mathematics specialization for high school students. The average age of the students participating in the study was 34. These students had chosen teaching as a second career, after having worked in a different profession for a number of years. The students had experienced three different schools.

**Methodology**

A qualitative worldview was used to guide the process of analyzing the data in this study, with an emphasis on analyzing thematic content in an inductive-constructivist manner that reflects a detailed understanding of the concepts and intentions of the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). A thematic content analysis of 22 seminar papers submitted by students during a course on curriculum planning was conducted. The basic assumption was that every study is a political act, since it not only reflects reality, but also influences and creates it, *inter alia* by making criticism and calling for change. The researcher's position on a given reality influences the choice of research topic and questions, the research procedure and the words chosen by the researcher to describe their findings and conclusions, which in turn shape reality (Ife, 1997). The seminar paper texts, in particular the introductions and descriptions of the research categories, contain representations that can be analyzed, such as attitudes, narratives, interpretations, feelings, beliefs, perceptions, identities, ideologies, habits and practices. A seminar paper's research question represents the subject that the student is investigating. The design process of the research question represents a worldview, a way of thinking, the theoretical conceptualization acquired by the researcher and of course the challenge that preoccupies him/her in the research process. It should be noted that students were given a wide range of choice in research with little guidance. The main issues that arose in the context of curriculum planning and analysis have been identified and mapped (Charmaz, 2009). In addition, as necessary, interviews were conducted, aimed at deepening, understanding and validating interpretations.

**Findings and discussion**

In order to present findings, student-teachers were chosen who displayed the concept of the role of "intellectual as reality-changer" (Cochran-Smith, 2008), and who view the school as an arena to implement social justice, e.g. statements such as, "*I chose education because I understood that I wanted to contribute to society, I chose mathematics because it is a profession that is a selector and preserves positions of power in society, and I intend to work with a weakened population,*" demonstrate that these student teachers are motivated by ideologies of individuation, which dictate that society and culture adapt to the developmental needs of the individual, as opposed to ideologies of acculturation or socialization (Lam, 2000). In light of this, it is natural that attention in practical experience would be directed towards the exposure and identification of social educational injustices such as selection mechanisms: "*Separation causes students to feel 'weaker' and to exert less effort to elevate the group*," wrongs like the unfair allocation of resources, for example: "*many study hours are invested in the provision of individual lessons during school hours ... the school has built designated rooms in which individual lessons are taught and studied. The decisions over who receives individual lessons and how often are not clear*," or the pursuit of grades, for example: "*They feel the need to prove themselves against their friends and teachers, and so they are very competitive, achieving ...When they get a test back, they like to compare grades and laugh at students who did not succeed as they did."* The student teachers notice cases where teaching is ineffective, for example: "*There are students in this class whose mother tongue is not Hebrew. The teacher teaches certain material and after a few lessons, she checks and finds that the students do not understand the material she has taught and do not even know how to explain the basic concepts that she taught them on this subject."*

However, as part of their research during their field experience, the student teachers developed educational strategies and practices to deal with these injustices. Thematic analysis produced these categories, all of which deal with social reform: (a) Classification and differentiation practices: "*The class is divided into three groups, so mathematics is divisive, I want to narrow gaps, so it seems to me that mathematics can be a tool for reducing them." (b)* Practices related to teaching and learning methods: *"Different children need different things, so everyone has to learn in a different way"; "The subjects that were studied visually will show that students understand more and will even succeed in using knowledge outside the school."*

(c) Practices related to classroom climate and teacher-student relationships: "*Whether I like it or not, I have the feeling that I will be a teacher with less distance and more personal attention.*" "*When I was a student, I was ostracized a few times at school and I know what it is like when a teacher has to intervene, that's the teacher's job."*

(d) Practices related to the assessment of student achievement:Students and teachers sought to learn how to apply achievement assessments based more on meritocratic rules such as studenthood. "*Because the level of student achievement is lower than that of other schools, less emphasis should be placed on achievement and greater weight should be given to classroom behavior and effort.*"

(e) Practices relating to organization around learning: "Phillipus studies in a school for immigrant children. One day he was lying on the table during a lesson. When I asked how to help him, he claimed he had nothing to write with. As soon as I offered him a pen he solved all the exercises that the teacher had written on the board with extraordinary speed and also quickly solved his homework. He has a talent for mathematics, but Phillipus is not considered one of the good students. He seems to need a slightly different learning environment where he can practice and do his homework."

**Conclusions**

Mapping the challenges and practices that emerged in the research projects of students of teaching as a second career indicates that the school is an arena of distributive and social justice in which there are diverse and valuable educational resources. Teachers' motivations for choosing the profession, their perceptions of their roles in general, and teachers' perceptions of justice in particular all play a key role in implementing the principles of justice. The students describe research issues and formulate research questions around a desire to understand how to improve the social and educational situation of children and adolescents in school. As a starting point for effecting change, they describe the real injustices that bother them, as they see and interpret them in the field over many days and hours. Alongside these, they express the wish to investigate and implement practices of social reform.

These findings may inform policy-makers in the context of screening candidates for teaching, as well as school principals regarding the desired organizational culture, to provide them with greater autonomy in planning and classroom management. Thanks to the students' ability to see the half-empty glass before the full glass—the gap between what is real and what is desired and appropriate—there is room for optimism. However, studies show that alongside the high capacity of these student-teachers in teaching tasks, there is a low feeling of competence with respect to involvement and influence in the organization (Wagner & Imanuel-Noy, 2014). In light of this, if they are not empowered to realize their ideologies, only time will tell how many of them will remain in the education system and effect systemic change. In this regard, it is worth following up with these graduates in longitudinal studies.