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When Theory Enters Kindergarten: Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap in Teachers’ Training

(Notes below 1)

Today we’ll present research we call: When Theory Enters Kindergarten: Bridging the Theory-Practice Gap in teachers’ training

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Practice based Theory

The Turn Towards Practice-Based Teacher Education…

Enhance Understanding, Theoretical Knowledge, and Critical Thinking Skills

(Notes below 3)

Traditionally, Teacher Training has emphasized a clear differentiation between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge.

* However, a recent turn has occurred, placing greater emphasis on the application and utilization of knowledge in real-world contexts (as highlighted by Grossman, Kavanagh, & Pupik Dean,2018).
* According to Harpaz (2016), when students apply their knowledge in new contexts, it enhances and deepens their understanding, theoretical knowledge, and critical thinking skills.

While the existing body of research focuses on teacher training, there is a lack of studies on kindergarten teacher training.

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Bridging the Gap

(Notes below 4)

In an effort to bridge the gap, we have selected three courses that were previously offered at the college and transformed them into practice-based courses taught in kindergartens. Today, we will present a study that was conducted alongside these courses and highlight the key insights that have emerged from it.

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Practice-Based courses

(Notes below 5)

The courses were

* "Theatre in Kindergarten (+),"
* "Development of Theory of Mind in Early Childhood (+)“,
* and "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs” (+).

The courses were taught in complexes of kindergartens, where the students attend and experience every week as part of their Practicum.

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Research objectives

research objective: investigate the impact of practice-based courses on nurturing understanding, meaningful learning

research question: how such integration promotes meaningful learning and effective teaching?

(Notes below 6)

* The research aimed to investigate the impact of practice-based courses on fostering understanding and meaningful learning, by bridging the gap between theory and practice.
* The research question explored how such integration promotes meaningful learning and effective teaching.

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Research Methodology

Interviews with students

Interviews with lecturers

Blog &

reflections analysis

(Notes below 7)

The study participants were 9 students and 3 lecturers.

* Open interviews were conducted with the students
* and the lecturers. And,
* A Blog with reflecting written posts was analyzed.

Ethical considerations were made:

Interviews were anonymous and the students were insured that it would not affect the students' grades.

Gabi Landler Pardo, who is not a member of the early childhood education department, conducted the interviews and their analysis.

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Findings: Major Themes

* Theory & Practice
* Setting Impacts Process
* Practice & content

(Notes below 8)

Major themes emerged from the data analysis: today we will present only 3 of them:

* Theory & Practice: the teaching and learning experience
* Setting impacts the learning Process: In terms of Time, Space, and Size of the learning groups
* Practice and content acquiring content through practice

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Theory & Practice

Lecturers:

“I've been teaching this course for many years, and I've never had such a good, exciting experience. The experience was that things were very, very connected and that the students are really learning. as if fulfilling a fantasy of how they should learn to be a kindergarten teacher.”

“It was great, I found myself peeling all the excess, all the unnecessary things, really coming to something very, very precise.

But, in order to deal correctly and deeply with this subject, they must come with some theoretical background”

Students:

“I think when you see something practically in front of your eyes, you examine, you write, you come up with ideas, you wrestle with yourself with questions, it is remembered better, it is engraved. It's far more effective than just studying theory and then being tested on it.”

“I think it would be much better if we study one week in college, and then come to the kindergarten just to experience. We study Theory better at the college.”

(Notes below 9)

The course, which involved student observations, facilitated a profound and accurate integration of theory and practice: (+) “I've been teaching this course for many years, and I've never had such a good, exciting experience. The experience was that things were very, very connected and that the students are really learning. as if fulfilling a fantasy of how they should learn to be a kindergarten teacher.”

* As for the students, one of them said: “I think when you see something practically in front of your eyes, you examine, you write, you come up with ideas, you wrestle with yourself with questions, it is remembered better, it is engraved. It's far more effective than just studying theory and then being tested on it.”

The experience created in the course which was based on theory and experiments in kindergarten, reflected the doubts of both the lecturer and the students: (+) “It was great, I found myself peeling all the excess, all the unnecessary things, really coming to something very, very precise. But, in order to deal correctly and deeply with this subject, they must come with some theoretical background”. And the student claimed (+) “I think it would be much better if we study one week in college, and then come to the kindergarten just to experience. We study Theory better at the college.”

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Setting

Space

(left) “They said they preferred to study in a different kindergarten complex, because it's a much friendlier complex”

(right) “It was a bit disappointing, because I felt that we were not part of the kindergarten routine. We were externals, sort of intruders”

Time

(left) “I felt that time did not allow me to teach this course optimally”

“One of the things I learned is that the 3 hours is a great gift, I didn't worry that we wouldn't get to learn all the material”

“What I liked so much about the structure of the course is that it's very close to how children learn in kindergarten, there is no lesson-break, lesson-break... Learning happens all the time”

(right) “It was like this: we talked about it for fifteen minutes, then we went to see it, then came back, then talked about what happened, and so on… it's a feeling of doing. It’s Experiential learning.”

(Notes below 10)

In the context of the theme “Setting affects the process," several criteria, such as space and time management, were discussed. Some of the students mentioned that they found space challenging: (+) “It was a bit disappointing, because I felt that we were not part of the kindergarten routine. We were externals, sort of intruders”.

It was also present in their dialogue with the lecturer: (+) “They said they preferred to study in a different kindergarten complex, because it's a much friendlier complex”.

The perception of time management varied among the lecturers. One of them stated: (+) ”I felt that time did not allow me to teach this course optimally”.

And the second lecturer expressed the opposite perspective: (+) “One of the things I learned is that the 3 hours is a great gift, I didn't worry that we wouldn't get to learn all the material” Furthermore, regarding time management and its impact on learning, the lecturer elaborated: “What I liked so much about the structure of the course is that it's very close to how children learn in kindergarten, there is no lesson-break, lesson-break... Learning happens all the time”.

The students’ words point out the significance: (+) “It was like this: we talked about it for fifteen minutes, then we went to see it, then came back, then talked about what happened, and so on… it's a feeling of doing. It’s Experiential learning.”

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Practice & Content

(Top) “It was most successful. Practical and relevant to our everyday life. It was brilliant - we went to observe inside kindergartens, and then came back and reported, and talked about the issues that really concern us. It still resonates when I practice.”

(Below) Students

(Below) “The course gave me courage to instruct the children despite the difficulty. after learning and receiving knowledge, that was clear and fragmented, also macro vision and micro vision –

I did it well. I felt comfortable and the children enjoyed it. So yes, it was fruitful. It was the best!”

(Notes below 11)

The students testify that they acquired understanding and tools (practice) in the courses and were able to apply the knowledge in new contexts:

* “It was most successful. Practical and relevant to our everyday life. It was brilliant - we went to observe inside kindergartens, and then came back and reported, and talked about the issues that really concern us. It still resonates when I practice.”

And another one said:

* “The course gave me courage to instruct the children despite the difficulty. after learning and receiving knowledge, that was clear and fragmented, also macro vision and micro vision. I did it well. I felt comfortable and the children enjoyed it. So yes, it was fruitful. It was the best!”

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Conclusions

2 models bridged the Gap

Observation-based

Activation-based

↓

Understanding

(Harpaz, 2016)

(Notes below 12)

* The courses presented two models that bridged the gap between theory and practice:

one model was based on observations in kindergarten,

while the other involved practical activities with the children.

The study's findings indicate that the practice-based courses effectively encouraged and facilitated (+)

* the understanding and application of knowledge in real-life situations.

The learning experience in kindergarten significantly contributed to this process, despite the challenges encountered, which highlighted the need for program refinement. One of the study's notable conclusion was that the courses and their teaching approach fostered a strong desire for understanding among both students and lecturers, echoing the conditions given in learning, expressed by Harpaz: Our curricula were stimulating, our teaching methods were encouraging, the learning environment was diverse and adaptable, and the physical infrastructure supported the learning process. We were thrilled to discover that the integration of theory and practice indeed led to a new level of understanding among our students.