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Recommendations for curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation based on the MITs

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Author(s): Rivi Carmel, Haya Kaplan, Orit Dahan, Bellie Maram, Malka Zinker, Waleed Dallasheh, Idit Pasternak.

Abstract:

Following the Executive Report on the academic courses in HEIs (W.P:1.3.2) which details the content and syllabi of the new courses, this report amalgamates the content and presents recommendations for curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation based on the MITs. The underlying principle behind designing curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation is the improvement of teacher preparation and induction based on learning outcomes from MITs. Set within the context of teacher preparation curriculum, as determined by Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the MoE, this recommendation is guided by the effects of the MITs for the improvement of teacher education and induction into schools.

Keyword list: Accreditation, school culture, socialization, professional identity, values, courses

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Recommendations for curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation based on the MITs.

Introduction

Following the Executive Report on the academic courses in HEIs (W.P:1.3.2) which details the content and syllabi of the new courses, this report amalgamates the content and presents recommendations for curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation based on the MITs. The underlying principle behind designing curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation is the improvement of teacher preparation and induction based on learning outcomes from MITs. Set within the context of teacher preparation curriculum, as determined by Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the MoE, this recommendation is guided by the effects of the MITs for the improvement of teacher education and induction into schools.

The impact of MITs on HEIs – a shift

MITs in their various models aim to provide optimal conditions for interns and BTs to feel a sense of belonging, increased self-efficacy and autonomy for smooth and successful assimilation in school. The MITs are good examples for creating a safe environment for interns and BTs to share their apprehensions and challenges, meet different position holders from their local context and schools and build their confidence as beginning teachers. Additionally, MITs are good examples for collaborative work between peers, creating partnerships between position holders in schools, in the community, with MoE representatives and more. Mentors, school coordinators, college facilitators and other MIT participants work together in helping BTs and interns to better understand schools' challenging environment and provide them with tools to meet the demands of the job.

The different models of MITs have been carefully developed as result of intensive, collaborative work of the heads of the induction units in the colleges, position holders in the MoE and local authorities. It can be argued that MITs created a shift in the focus from induction workshops that typically take place in the HEIs to induction workshops arranged within the schools, in local authorities, municipalities or Pisgah center (center for teacher development). On this basis, it can also be argued that reaching out by HEIs to the community and its stakeholders has created a stronger bond and robust partnership with local communities and schools (for example the MIT in Lakiya Druze town opened in 2017-18).

The MITs models, initiated, led and ran by facilitators from the HEIs, see the induction into teaching as the interim stage bridging between the pre-service stage (carried out by the colleges) and the professional development stage, controlled, led and run by the MoE. In so doing the colleges have thus taken a more significant role and additional responsibility in the teacher

preparation process – seen as a continuum. Inspired by work with interns, BTs, mentors and stakeholders in the MITs, the active involvement and participation of pedagogical staff and management in the colleges has increased significantly. All pedagogical guides, heads of departments and heads of faculties in the colleges are familiar with the Proteach project and with MITs workshops. It has become evident that the MITs’ most significant impact is related to practical aspects of teacher education, seen as a continuum from teacher training and preparation to successful assimilation and retention in schools.

MITs as an accredited career orientation course

All induction workshops in their various formats (referred to as ‘regular’ induction workshops or ‘incubators’) are part of the undergraduate curriculum, which is programmed in students’ 4th and final year of studies. Thus, induction workshops are regarded as accredited career orientation courses and merit 2 credits (60 academic hours). This means that when MITs were introduced in 2016-17, they too, were part of the undergraduate curriculum and were awarded full academic credit. This resulted in a wash-back effect, affecting both the ‘regular’ induction workshops and the other academic courses which focus on teachers’ pedagogical and educational practices. Other ‘regular’ workshops unofficially adopted some of the principles and practices of MITs and included position holders, mentors and school principals in the workshop meeting- for the benefit of the interns. Similarly, pedagogical guides in the different departments were minded to the importance of including topics related to teachers’ personal characteristics such as identity, emotions, efficacy, confidence and resilience on the one hand, and school related topics such as understanding school culture, autonomy and belonging and collaboration, on the other.

The place of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Council for Higher Education (CHE)

In Israel, institutions of higher education operate under the authority of the Council for Higher Education (CHE), which is headed by the Minister of Education. It grants accreditation, authorizes the awarding of academic degrees, and advises the government on the development and financing of higher education and scientific research (CHE official website). Additionally, Teacher education colleges work closely with the MoE which is responsible for all educational institutions (kindergartens, schools, higher education and non-formal education) and are responsible for legislation and planning education services and licensing professionals. This situation creates the need for a tight connection between the colleges and the MoE. One of the key responsibilities of HEIs is the training and preparation of the interns (who are still students in their 4th and final year of studies) during their induction year. This is so despite the fact that the actual teaching takes place in schools, and the local authorities and MoE are responsible for interns' employment.

New academic courses based on MITs

Academic courses specific for the improvement of teacher preparation and induction draw on the learning outcomes from MITs. In order to implement this, the heads of the induction units in the HEIs, in collaboration with staff members and management in the colleges, closely examined the syllabi, content and good examples of MITs so as to include key issues relevant to interns and BTs. Thus, the syllabi of the new academic courses or modules are the basis on which a general recommendation can be drawn upon.

Recommendations for curriculum and syllabi for teachers' accreditation

The following 4 topics represent core components for syllabi for new academic courses or modules.

1: Teachers' personal soft skills.

Based on insights from the MITs it has become clear that teacher's successful assimilation into school cannot be separated from the personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the individual. This relates to developing teachers' inner resources, autonomy, sense of belonging and resilience as they become teachers. It is likely that teachers who develop a high measure of 'soft personal qualities' such as enthusiasm, motivation and creativity, will exhibit resourcefulness and work towards developing resilient responses with the aim of being effective and successful at their jobs (Schaefer, Long & Clandinin, 2012). The academic course designed in Kaye college is an example of a course which emphasizes 'soft personal skills' versus theoretical or pedagogical resources. We recommend that personal and professional factors must be brought together to help students- future teachers- learn to adapt and cope well with adversity within the context of teaching. Nurturing teachers' 'soft characteristics', personal attributes and strengths may build their resilience, result in improved and more effective teaching (Kourouba, 2012) and contribute to long –term commitment to the profession (Hong, 2012; Reed, 2017).

2: Developing school partnerships – Communities of Practice

Among the important outcomes of the MITs is the understanding that a significant part in developing teacher effectivity, resilience and sustainability is building supportive shared partnerships and a positive sense of professional learning communities in schools. A positive, supportive environment, where experience is shared and good practices are discussed by peers,

guided by the school management, contribute to teacher growth and developments (Seifert & Mandzuk, 2006). Research has shown that the provision of effective support such as emotional and administrative support, reduced work load and time for peer collaboration to beginning teachers can prevent premature attrition of high quality teachers (Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2009). Support system provided by the principal and veteran teachers as well as team work and sharing responsibilities with colleagues. The environment for this should be provided by the school and led by veteran expert teachers in full cooperation with new teachers. When beginning teachers are encouraged to play an active role in the teachers' community within the school, and take part in decision making processes, they are likely to feel appreciated, secure, confident and motivated. Peer support, knowledge sharing, and fostering a sense of belonging to a group are seen as important factors for developing resilience, effectivity and growth (Hong, 2102). Thus, the more teachers are engaged in professional learning communities, communities of practice (Wenger, 2011) where teachers share and discuss their successful and unsuccessful practices, where supportive feedback is provided, the more effective they will be in teaching. (Little, 2002). Thus, academic courses in the HEIs must incorporate partnership and collaborative skills in their curriculum.

3: Academic courses and accreditation

Outcomes from MITs have led us to recommend that the synergy between the academic organizations (colleges) and schools, local authorities (Pisgah centers) and the MoE be extended and sustained. Maintaining the contact between schools and he HEIs can be accomplished by adding more responsibility to schools while releasing some of the control exerted form the HEIs. For example, conducting academic sessions within the school, instead of in the HEI campuses, may seem a technical change at first but has positively impacted both the college at large and the

BTs. The MIT in Mekif Het high school in Beer Sheva, facilitated by Kaye college, is one such example. Another recommendation is to give recognition and accreditation to the BTs for the work they do in school. For example, credit can be granted to interns who initiated projects in school, such as initiating a student council in a high school for students with special needs (Gil and Yahdav MIT facilitated by Kibbitzim college). Along similar lines, credit can be granted to interns who initiate or facilitate classroom or school projects: develop effective ways to deal with classroom management or engage in more complex initiatives for the benefit of the school. Credit can also be granted for overall successful integration.

HEIs are obliged to address the global demand of training teachers for needs of the 21st century. Exploring the intersection of teacher education and 21st century skills is one of the challenges HEIs are dealing with on a regular basis worldwide. Methods to prepare and assess teachers' 21st century skills should be done within the educational setting they are in (ie schools) and should include evaluating teachers' adaptability as displayed in the school and its community. Other 21st century skills may include initiatives, involvement in schools' life and leaderships skills. Thus, based on the above, students and interns should be awarded credit not only for academic achievements but also for their practical implementations of core practices they have been learning in their teacher preparation curriculum. This type of 'situated assessment' lends itself to stronger synergy and cooperation between HEIs and schools. This holistic approach to interns' evaluation and accreditation highlights the notion that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. In other words; the interaction, organization, dynamics and accreditation of teacher induction is all part of the teacher preparation process.

4: Professional identity and self-efficacy

The literature on teacher retention show that motivation, high self-efficacy and enthusiasm are positively associated with self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Reeve, 2015) job satisfaction, and that these characteristics, together with a solid professional identity, may lead to effectivity and retention (Hobson, Ashby, & Tomlinson, 2009). Learning outcomes form the MITs show that developing a strong professional identity and fostering self-esteem is more effective on BTs when integrated with contextual factors in school such as support and team work. Thus, it is recommended that academic courses that enhance the development of personal and professional identity in teaching, be granted more weight and credit. An example for this can be taken from the new course developed in Beith Berl college, namely: *'Development of personal and professional identity in teaching'*. The course was designed following a request from participants in Hadasim MIT (a school which includes boarding facilities) who sought the need for a course to emphasize the varied roles of teachers as educators. The course included topics that enhanced students' critical self- reflection and understanding about his/her personal and professional values, and points of intersection between them. Similarly, the course sought to develop pedagogical knowledge to promote value thinking within and outside of the discipline so that BTs would see the relationship between the role of the educator and other school roles. To sum up, the process constructing a strong professional identity is composed of both personal and professional factors that need to be facilitated via the collaborative work of teacher educators in the HEIs together with schools' management and staff.

Conclusion

Proteach project and the MITs have affected the HEIs in different ways. The project has shaped the development and design of the academic courses to address the needs of interns and BTs while staying true to each of the college's missions and spirit. In the attempt to learn from the outcomes of the MITs and following a close review of each academic course, its objectives and detailed syllabus (see W.P:1.3.2), the following topics are recommended as core subjects in academic courses aiming to prepare future teachers for a smooth assimilation into school. The list is not in order of preference or importance. It is followed by a suggested reference list (excluding references in Hebrew).

1. The educator's place in the school fabric.
2. Develop familiarity with student expectations, the education system, the educator and the parents.
3. developing inner resources as we become teachers.
4. Professional identity
5. The school as an organization
6. Challenges of the beginning teacher
7. Developing personal 'soft skills' for effective interaction
8. Collaboration and communication skills
9. Teachers' partnerships and participation in school as a community of practice
10. The BT/NT as an initiator, creator, inventor
11. The BT/NT as a leader

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