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The Changes in Training Teachers' Roles Performance Following Academy-Classroom Practical Training Model

Issa Nael¹, Lena Gnaim¹

¹ Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education

Correspondence: Nael Issa. Email: nael-e@qsm.ac.il

Abstract

Academy-Classroom model is the most recent program adopted by the Ministry of Education in Israel for trainee teachers' practical training. One of the model's primary goals is to bridge the gap between the needs and the reality of the school in connection with how academic institutions prepare their teachers. The study aimed to research the role performance in training teachers following the Academy-Classroom model's implementation, compared to their role under previous training plans, and to explore whether changes had taken place. Forty-four training teachers within the academy class framework took part in the study. All of them had worked as training teachers in previous models. The research was conducted using a mixed quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The findings show a broader integration of the training teachers in the process of preparing and qualifying the trainee students. The results demonstrate a statistically significant increase in the training teachers' role performance in social perspective, training with a focus on a subject matter guidance, mentoring students with an emotional approach, and personal responsibility for training and qualifying the trainee students. Academy-Classroom model has resulted in a paradigmatic shift in the training teachers' role and work methods.

Keywords: Training Teacher, Partnership in Education and Training, Training Program

1. Theoretical background

Practical training constitutes an essential and vital stage in the qualification and preparation of teachers. It is considered one of the most critical academic processes that shape the personality of trainee teachers. It helps develop many useful and valuable practical skills such as class management of varying levels, acquiring organizational abilities, handling general matters in schools, and many other competencies (Kirk, Macdonald, & O'Sullivan, 2006).

The training teacher or the cooperating teacher, "a collaborator with the academic institution," as defined in many articles, is seen as the most crucial pillar in the success of practical education for the training teacher (Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006), a role model and a professional example to be followed. Training teachers help trainees discover, learn, and acquire tools and talents in the field (Maskit & Meburach, 2013; Silberstein et al., 2006). However, some people diminish their importance and influence. They even point to the possibility of a

negative impact, especially in the sense of not being updated in teaching methods that conform to the requirements of the 21st century (Lev Ary & Smith, 2004).

Various concepts have been used to describe the work of the training teacher. These concepts refer to different assumptions and expectations of how the cooperating training teacher should act and inspire the trainee. Three descriptions are most widely applied and accepted to describe this teacher, namely: the placeholder teacher, the supervising teacher, and the educator teacher. (Clarke, 2007; Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994).

The trainee teacher acts as “a classroom placeholder,” replacing the training teacher in the classroom when he/she goes to the library or the teachers’ room. In this case, the trainee student bears the full responsibility of the educational process delivering the classroom content, controlling the class, carrying out educational activities, and other actions. (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). It is noteworthy that this method is rarely applied in recent years.

The second term given to the training teacher, which is currently the most common, embodies a more advanced position. He/She practices more the role of a supervisor. The cooperating teacher oversees the trainee students’ work and performs more effective roles, such as: conducting observations, a stage evaluation, and a final evaluation of the trainee students (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). Although this interpretation reflects progress compared to the previous one, the work of the cooperating teacher seems still limited and does not go beyond supervision and assessment.

The third concept, the “educator teacher,” reflects a fundamental difference compared to the previous two models. It implies an interactive and giving function, whereby the cooperating teacher acts as an educator. He/She works closely with the trainee encouraging the student and facilitating the training process in addition to the already mentioned traditional tasks (Clarke, 1997; Hatch, 1993; Kettle & Sellars, 1996).

It is quite challenging to define the training teacher’s role. The difficulty lies in the requirements and tasks assigned to this position (Gilles & Willson, 2004). Research about this subject suggests a wide range of duties assigned to the training teacher as part of his/her responsibilities. These tasks include training and coaching, acting as a role model for the trainee, acting as an agent of change, and helping to stimulate reflective evaluative thinking that amounts to emotional and moral support (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lazovsky & Riechenberg, 2005; Runyan, 1999). Rengolde suggested (2009) that three main complex functions are assigned to the cooperating teacher: training the student with a social perspective, focusing on guidance on subject matter, and managing students using an emotional approach.

The work of a training teacher requires a stable relationship and partnership between the school, the training teacher, and the academic institution. This liaison entails facing many challenges and obstacles, such as overcoming the difference in institutional culture and organizational goals, which may limit the opportunities to succeed. The most productive collaboration is one that allows a “working space” for all parties involved in the educational process. It is based on respecting the other partner’s views, discussing mutual proposals, and setting common goals, expectations, and approaches before moving forward (Greany & Brown, 2015). Aria (2001) sees the partnership between educational institutions and schools as an opportunity for simultaneous development for all parties, whether student trainees, academic counselors, and training teachers.

In recent decades, there have been many improvements in practical education, most notably the Professional Development Schools (PDS) model, which focuses on strengthening the partnership between the schools where teachers gain practical experience and the academic institutions where they study (Clark, 1990; Goodlad, 1990). According to the PDS model, academic institutions provide theoretical knowledge for applied schools, and in return, schools provide practical and applied knowledge related to teachers’ work and the school system. The PDS model brought changes to the training teacher’s role in practical and applied training. These changes mainly depended on nurturing the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the trainee students, making it more balanced. In PDS, trainees learn to be teachers by collaborating with their colleagues, primarily through receiving support and advice from a training teacher. This type of application is a positive experience that

exposes students and teachers to real decision-making methods through interaction with various education partners (Ariav, 2001; Zelberstein, 1995).

Teacher training schools in Israel combine different types of practical training: traditional training, the PDS model, and the Academy-Classroom model, which is examined in the present study.

Academy-Classroom Model

The Academy-Classroom model is the most recent practical training program adopted by the Ministry of Education in Israel. The model was developed when a gap was recognized between the needs and the reality of schools and how academic institutions prepare their teachers. This inconsistency needed to be bridged through practical efforts from both sides (schools and academic institutions). Another insight that contributed to the project was an acknowledgement of the need to deepen and support the participation of academic institutions in working to achieve the goals established by the education system (Chadash, 2016). Two theories serve as the background of this model: constructivism and the theory of cooperative teaching and learning (Maskit & Meburach, 2013).

One of the most important goals of this model is to help schools' have a more prominent intervention in the professional qualification of future teachers (Ministry of Education, 2014). The model relies on building a strong alliance between academia and schools to find solutions to various issues such as fostering meaningful learning in the classroom and improving the quality of instruction of trainee teachers, as well as the quality of the professional development of training teachers.

The Academy-Classroom model is based on the principles of the PDS model, which was implemented in Israel decades ago. Still, the Academy-Classroom model includes broader objectives, associations, and more generous assistance between educational institutions and schools. Through the Academy-Classroom structure, training teachers are recruited through coordinated efforts between the academic institution, represented by the educational counselor and the school administration, and the Ministry of Education's Inspection Department. Moreover, academic institutions provide professional preparation courses for training teachers (Assadi & Murad, 2017).

According to the Academic-Classroom model, third-year teaching students go to schools for 2-3 days each week, studying 12-14 hours per week throughout the academic year. They are coached and mentored by experienced school teachers. Their extensive attendance in schools throughout the week exposes the trainee teachers to a vast and diversified scope of teaching methods. This schedule allows them to plan and complete various educational and scholastic activities that keep pace with technological developments and updates in ministerial teaching curricula.

Through the Academy-Classroom program, the training teacher has particular significance in the learning process by assuming a number of key responsibilities and duties that differ from previous models' practices. The teacher is expected to be a counselor and mediator in the various educational and pedagogical situations that may arise inside and outside the classroom, and to take an active part in the cultural and organizational environment of the school, addressing real-time and individual situations while applying an enriched educational vision that provides the student with a unique perspective.

The requirements and expectations of the Academy-Classroom model demand that the training teachers invest a significant amount of personal and professional time and effort. They must undergo specialized professional courses to meet performance standards.

This model adopts a co-teaching procedure whereby the training teacher and the trainee student work as co-educators to plan, give, and manage lessons, complementing each other's work. A typical practice is that one teaches while the other provides support, alternating roles and offering diverse teaching strategies (Cook & Friend, 1995).

2. Research Questions

Since the inception of the Academy-Classroom model, several academic institutions in Israel have adopted the program, and several studies have examined its potential. However, as far as we know, no research has been done to evaluate the impact of this model based on the actual transformative work it delivers to the training teachers. Hence, this research was organized with the following aims:

1. To examine the changes in training teachers' role performance following the implementation of the Academy-Classroom model.
2. To investigate whether a paradigm change has taken place in the training teachers' roles following the implementation of the Academy-Classroom model. The exploration is centered on participants that have also worked according to traditional models.

3. Methodology

Participants. Forty-four training teachers. All of them applied previously to be training teachers in the PDS model. The teachers are from eight elementary schools in northern Israel and are in charge of third-year teacher trainees majoring in science education.

Research Method. The research included a mixed methodology combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Research. The researchers developed a special questionnaire for the study. The questionnaire compared a traditional model of practical training with the Academic-Classroom model. A group of experts in pedagogical guidance checked its validity. The researchers also examined the reliability of the tool by testing it on a pilot group. The questionnaire included 27 items in addition to open-ended questions. Based on previous studies (Ringgold, 2009), the questionnaire was divided into three categories. The reliability of each category was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The results showed a sufficient level of reliability: the first category related to emotional support, and included nine items ($\alpha = 0.78$). The second category related to the training teacher's role as a social guide for the trainee students, and included nine items ($\alpha = 0.82$). The third category related to training teachers' roles as guides on subject matter, and contained nine items ($\alpha = 0.79$). The results of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software.

Qualitative Research. This was done through individual interviews with eight teachers according using semi-structured interviews. The qualitative portion aimed to provide an opportunity for the interviewees to explain in detail their perception of their own role from personal and professional points of view. This section included various open-ended questions, such as: "Tell me about your role as an Academy-Classroom training teacher" or "What changes have taken place in your work as a training teacher under the new model."

Analysis of Qualitative Data. Interview analysis began with an in-depth reading of each interview, focusing on the perceptions of the interviewees. The main ideas were classified, contrasted, categorized, and merged into a common group to create an entire set of categories.

Procedure

Quantitative Questionnaire. The quantitative questionnaire was presented directly to the participants. The purpose of the study was explained, and the participants completed it in voluntarily and anonymously.

Qualitative Research. The participants were chosen at random. The researchers approached them individually to request their collaboration in an academic study, stating that their participation was optional and confidential. The interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes.

3. Findings

The effect of the Academy-Classroom model on training teachers' roles

Quantitative Results Analysis. The mean and standard deviations were determined for the different categories of the training teachers' roles. The Academy-Classroom program and the traditional model were analyzed comparatively using "T" test for paired samples.

The findings indicate (Table 1) a significant increase ($t(42)=3.92$, $p < 0.01$) in the training teachers' roles performance in all categories for the Academy-Classroom model ($M=4.32$, $SD=.49$), when compared with the traditional model ($M=3.68$, $SD=.82$). The results also reveal an important improvement in each role category in the Academic-Classroom model compared to the same category in the traditional model. The data could not confirm a statistically notable difference between the Academy-Classroom's different role categories.

Table 1: The role performance of training teachers in the Academy-Classroom model compared to the traditional model

Category	Traditional model N (44) M (SD)	Academy-Classroom Model N (44) M (SD)	t (42)
Emotional support	3.60 (.85)	4.28 (.56)	4.78**
Social Guidance	3.78 (1.07)	4.44 (.72)	2.49 *
subject matter guidance	3.57 (.76)	4.33 (.50)	5.36**

* $P < .05$ ** $P < .01$

Qualitative Results Analysis. The qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed some relevant issues.

Emotional support. This aspect was the most prominent and vital feature that training teachers appreciated in their role within the Academy-Classroom model. As one of them stated:

It feels to me like a parental relationship, given my generation, experience, and seniority. I deal with the people who work with me without barriers, and listen to them, to their feelings and the difficulties they face, and to their observations. We listen to them and give them notes to help them improve.

Social support. According to the results, the training teachers considered social support, i.e., counseling and integrating trainees into the school's educational social life, as the second essential feature of the Academy-Classroom environment.

One of the training teachers pointed out: "When students come, they are not aware of the 'dance' that is part of how the school runs, so first, we teach them about it. And this makes them understand how the school works."

Subject matter guidance. This aspect was the third most important, and is well expressed by the words of this teacher: "Our job is to help the trainee students realize themselves, and to discuss teaching methods and strategies with them in a manner that is appropriate to the subject and age group of the classes."

Personal responsibility for training and qualifying the trainee students. The qualitative analysis also has denoted strong evidence in favor of interpreting the Academy-Classroom plan as having expanded the authority and competencies of the training teacher. Their judgment can be decisive in determining the failure or success of the trainee student in the practical training. This responsibility seems to reinforce the training teachers' sense of partnership and commitment towards preparing and qualifying the trainee students.

A teacher summarized this, saying: "I feel a great responsibility to qualify them and prepare them to complete our journey."

4. Summary and Discussion

This study has examined the changes in training teachers' work following the implementation of the new Academy-Classroom model for practical training. The study examined the role performance of training teachers under the Academy-Classroom program and explored whether a paradigm shift took place in training teachers' roles.

The results demonstrate a statistically significant increase in the training teachers' role performance in four main areas: social perspective, training with a focus on a subject matter guidance, mentoring students with an emotional approach, and personal responsibility for training and qualifying the trainee students. Based on the findings, it was evident that the main focus of the cooperative teachers' work in the Academic-Classroom program is providing emotional support, followed by social guidance. Providing subject matter guidance was the third most significant theme.

The results also confirmed that, for the training teachers, emotional, social, and pedagogical support was more of a priority than technical and professional involvement. For example, even class observations were not carried out in a purely technical context but rather within an educational process. Such observations were usually preceded by consultation between the training teacher and the teaching trainee. Lessons were also delivered through collaboration, and supported by a session dedicated to discussing the lesson plan and its implementation. The results also show a broader integration in the process of preparing and qualifying the trainee students. The authority and responsibilities of the training teachers are increased, and they believe they have a definite impact on the trainee students' professional/career development. The abovementioned aspects have enforced the training teachers' sense of partnership and trust in guiding the trainees.

Conclusions

The new framework provided by the Academic-Classroom model has enhanced and stimulated the training teachers' functions. In the past, teacher training was a somewhat marginalized role. It lacked some of the characteristics necessary to satisfy practical instruction within the education system. The Academy-Classroom program has built a channel of communication that was previously absent and not fully established, enabling the training teachers to have a critical influence on the personal, social, and professional identity of future teachers.

The results of this study lead us to conclude that the Academic-Classroom model is able to bring about a paradigmatic shift in the role of training teachers' and their work. The training teacher is transformed from a "supervisory" teacher, who undertakes technical and professional tasks, to a comprehensive educator who cares for and supports trainee students (Clarke, 1997; Hatch, 1993; Kettle & Sellars, 1996).

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