The Importance of Transparent School Procedures and Norms for the Novice Teachers and their future Career in Instruction

Dr. Sarah Zamir [*]

Achva Academic College and Ben Gurion University at Eilat [Israel]

Abstract

The process of becoming a teacher involves learning the school procedures and norms, which give meaning to daily life at school. Teachers are a social creation molded by the expectations and actions of veteran teachers and principals who convey school procedures and norms. These codes define what is normal, acceptable and legitimate. Such codes differentiate between matters of greater and lesser importance and identify the sources of power in the school, as well as the significant ways of taking the necessary power to guarantee one's future career within the school. The aim of this research was to investigate the contribution of a school's procedures and norms, as perceived by novice teachers, to their future commitment to a teaching career. To this end, I applied a qualitative methodology based on responses to open-ended questions. The study's main findings indicate a complementary relationship between understanding of school procedures and norms and commitment to the teaching career. A novice teacher who understands the norms and procedures within the hidden layers of the organizational culture, will tend to develop a greater commitment to teaching career.

Key words: *School procedures and norms, novice teachers, teaching career, initiation.*

[*] Achva Academic College and Ben Gurion University at Eilat, Israel. Email: sara_zamir@walla.com

The written and unwritten procedures and norms of schools

Organizational culture is composed of overt and unseen levels (Samuel, 1990): at the overt level we find patterns of behavior, language and symbols; at the unseen level we find unwritten norms, values and fundamental assumptions. This level is immanent to understanding the school's organizational culture, as its components reflect the underlying assumptions of the organization and define what the employee is expected to do in order to excel and persevere at the job (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The values that are common to all the members of the organization - the norms and procedures - define the unique character of the school and the "proper" standards by which to function in it – what is "worthy" and "unworthy" with regard to the behavior of the teacher, the principal and other functionaries of the school.

Just as published rules are the values, attitudes, and expected behaviors that influence our actions, hidden rules also play a significant role in our professional lives. To the unexperienced, they are the unspoken expectations that can erode confidence and self-esteem when novice teachers misunderstand situations due to their own obliviousness (). The hidden rules also include the successful solutions to organizational problems that have accumulated over the years. New workers are expected to embrace the proper way to identify and solve problems even though they are not yet familiar with the school culture. This organizational culture has a tremendous impact on the level of an organization's effectiveness (Campbell & Southworth, 1992). Edgar Schein defined organizational culture as "the pattern of fundamental assumptions common to members of the group, which have become rooted in the group while solving problems having to do with the work of the organization" (Schein, 1992, p. 12).

Olson and Osborne (1991) found that novice teachers have a strong need to belong to school subcultures. This belonging provides a sense of physical and

emotional security, of acceptance, models for comparison and a basis for measuring success. Cheong (2000) found that one can attribute success or failure of the teacher to the extent to which they adopted the cultural norms and proceadures of the school and to the question of how well they understood the power relationships in the school and in the school district. These factors are interconnected and structure the expectations of the new teacher.

Novice teachers and their chosen career

Starting out is considered an intrinsic phase in the course of a teacher's career. Young teachers enter the profession filled with a sense of mission and the feeling that they will be able to implement changes in society, as well as in the education of their students. But despite their good intentions and despite being equipped with the proper training, they discover that the "real" world of teaching is significantly different from their idealized vision of it. Reality slaps them in the face; dreams and ideals quickly change into a daily struggle for survival (Gavish Friedman, 2007; Starhovsky, Marbach & Hertz-Lazarovich, 2002).

The psychological processes teachers undergo in their first years of work are especially demanding. In Israel they cause more than half of the teachers to quit in their first year of work (Starhovsky, Marbach & Hadar-Lazarovich, 2002).

It has been claimed that the many changes education systems in Israel and elsewhere have undergone in recent years, changes which have altered the organizational reality of schools, have added to the difficulties, because teachers are now expected to be organization-oriented (Friedman & Kass, 2002). In other words, they must have deep knowledge of the school's organizational environment and be able to operate efficiently within it.

Becoming a teacher is a process during which teachers define themselves as members of the teaching profession and internalize their own social-cultural

codes as well as those of the school in which they work, and feel as if they are performing the job with personal and professional mastery.

Fuller (1975) offers a model that describes the concerns of the teacher in three stages:

1. The survival stage: the concerns of the novice teacher focus mainly on survival as a teacher and on his or her personal wellbeing. The teacher asks, "Am I suited to be a teacher?", "Will the pupils like me?", "What do the others think of me?" In this stage, the novice teacher adapts to the school routine.

2. The task stage: the novice teacher begins to feel secure in his or her ability to deal with the daily routine of the classroom, to plan lessons and deal with classroom management. The teacher senses improvement in teaching skills and in command of the learning content. The concerns are now: "How good are my teaching materials?", "Will I have enough time to teach all the material?", "What is the best way to cover all the material?"

3. The influence stage: the novice teacher begins to worry about actualizing the individual potential of the students. The questions asked are: "Did all the students understand the material?", "To what extent are the students capable of applying what they have learned?", "How might I arouse the interest of the students?"

In this model, successful teaching experiences and overcoming difficulties in any stage is a prerequisite to advancing to the next stage. Novice teachers must satisfy the immediate demands that stem from feeling their self survival is threatened as well as feelings of lack of self-confidence in performing their teaching tasks, before they advance to their worries about influencing their students.

Examining the various stages of a teacher's career, Huberman (1989) identified six stages according to seniority:

1. The stage of survival and discovery: teachers confront the complexity of managing their teaching, they are overly concerned with themselves, the gap between ideals and daily reality in the classroom and the tremendous number of

teaching tasks to be performed. Discovery is connected to the initial enthusiasm of "being responsible for my students, my classroom and my plan for the year" and the feeling of being a colleague among peers. The elements of survival and discovery exist side by side: the latter enabling the survival of the novice teacher.

2. The stabilization stage: here teachers make their final choice in favor of commitment to the teaching profession (joining the professional community and forgoing other options) and the sense of control over and comfort with teaching grows.

3. The investigation and diversity stage: teachers attempt to increase their influence on the system; these attempts raise their awareness of the difficulties that limit such influence. Teachers try out different teaching methods, experience new areas of responsibility in the school, and look for new challenges.

4. The assessment and doubt stage: the "mid-career crisis", this begins with a sense of being worn down by routine which leads to an existential crises relating to question of whether to remain in the profession or to leave it. There is a growing sense of repetitiveness and sobering up from an illusion that comes after all the efforts to change the work in the school. Teachers realize that if they don't act fast, alternative careers will be out of reach.

5. The clarity and serenity stage: moving from energetic activity to a more mechanical style, in which the gradual loss of energy and enthusiasm is compensated, as it were, by the growing feeling of confidence and self acceptance.

6. The detachment and liberation stage: the gradual liberation from investing in one's work. This often accompanied by a feeling of bitterness deriving from external pressures to vacate ones place to younger colleagues and new ideas.

Beginning with the third stage, the picture becomes complicated and the teacher's development forks off into several tracks that eventually merge into one track (clear detachment or bitterness).

Borich (1999) offers a different approach in which the teacher's concerns do not proceed sequentially, but are dependent on context. There may be regression to previous stages of development, for example reverting from concerns about influence to concerns about tasks, as a consequence of unexpected demands to teach a new subject or a new age group. Consequently, there may be overlap between the stages: a teacher might be worrying about issues of two stages at once.

The manner and the time in which these developments take place depends on the biography or personal history of the novice teacher and the context in which the novice teacher works.

Method

Research Method: qualitative. According to Schein (1985), qualitative research is preferable to quantitative research in diagnosing organizational culture because it is context-oriented to the specific context in the field. Typically, qualitative research interpretation is "open" and in most cases does not provided definitive answers but rather takes into account different points of view and different explanations for the same phenomenon.

Research aim: to examine the consequences of school procedures and norms as conceived by novice teachers to their obligation to conduct career in education

Research questions:

• How does the novice teacher perceive the school written and unwritten procedures and norms?

• How does this perception influence the novice teacher's future obligation to conduct career in education?

2.4 Research tools: open-ended questionnaires dealing with how novice teachers perceive the school unwritten rules and their teacher's future obligation to conduct career in education. The questionnaire has Face Validity, since the questions relate to the popular and accepted components taken from the extensive literature on the subject.

Research sample: 15 novice teachers from two Israeli teacher education colleges.

3. Results

Table 1: Summary of findings from the open-ended questionnaire

	Area	Sample statements
1	**Clarity of school procedures and norms** Total positive responses: 8	"Procedures are repeated in various forums at school" "I know what I have to do" Things are made public and reach everyone" "The procedures and norms are adequately clear"
	Total negative responses: 7	"Norms and procedures are not sufficiently clear" "Students interpret things as they wish" "Teachers take short cuts"
2	**Their thoughts about their future career in the teaching** Total absolutely positive responses: 7	"I will be a caring, friendly and encouraging teacher" "My thinking is good – I will do things differently!" "I will invest time and energy in being a significant homeroom teacher" "The work is very satisfying" "It is a joy to take part in this important and essential role"

	Area	Sample statements
		"I hope I am up to the task"
	Total absolutely negative responses: 2	"I will continue my education to a position of decision-making" "I don't want to be in a classroom with 40 students and just spew out material!"
	Total responses involving doubts: 6	"My thinking is divided 50-50" "It's not clear" "Ambivalent feelings"

The questionnaires showed that 6 out of the 7 who said they were committed to teaching (85.7%) perceived the school's organizational culture as positive for the parameter "clarity of school procedures and norms".

Discussion

The process of becoming a teacher is accompanied by learning the written and the unwritten codes that give meaning to daily life at school. Teachers are a social product molded by the expectations and activities of the "culture carriers" of the school: principals, fellow teachers, students and even parents. In relating to them, novice teachers construct their own professional identity. Schempp (1999) describes the culture of a school as being composed of rules that describe what is normal, acceptable and legitimate. Cultural codes differentiate between what is important and what is less important, identify the school's power centers and the significant ways to apply the necessary power to ensure

one's status in the school. In his words, the novice teacher learns "how things really work in the school".

As they integrate into the teaching profession, novice teachers experience many difficulties at the outset, most of which are connected to the school's organizational spirit. Novice teachers have the most difficulty in basic understanding of the organizational life in the school, and therefore may find themselves lacking the tools to deal with the problems and difficulties of their job (Kremer-Hayon & Ben-Peretz, 1986).

The findings of the research reinforce the difficulty of the initial encounter of the trainee teacher with down-to-earth reality: of the 15 respondents, only 7 are positive that their future is in teaching career, within a school framework. Most are not at all convinced of this. Huberman (1989) notes that the survival and discovery stage is decisive in the development of the teacher; this stage is characterized by the confrontation of the teacher with the complexities of managing the teaching experience, of over-absorption with themselves, with the gap between ideals and the daily reality in the classroom, and the tremendous number of tasks the teacher must perform. He notes that the teacher experiences initial enthusiasm of "being responsible for my students, for my classroom and for my yearly program" as well as being a colleague of fellow teachers.

Of particular interest is the issue of clarity of procedures and norms as a component of the school organizational atmosphere. This component is significant in relation to the commitment to teaching, since the novice teachers were less inclined towards a future career in teaching, if procedures and norms in the school were not clear enough. Unlike the overt components of a school's organizational culture (attitude of management, connection with students, peers and parents), the hidden components, i.e. the procedures and norms, are the principle codes of that culture and deciphering them is actually what enables a teacher's wellbeing and security within the organization. It is precisely the hidden level that is immanent in the school's organizational atmosphere; This is

so since its components reflect its underlying assumptions and define what the employee must do in order to advance (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

According to Olson and Osborne (1991), the need to feel a sense of belonging is a powerful immanent component among novice teachers. Belonging provides the novice teacher with emotional security, acceptance, and the ability to compare oneself with veteran teachers, and thereby, have a basis for measuring success in the field of teaching.

The literature stresses the importance of "healthy" interaction between the newcomers and their fellow teachers. These reciprocal relationships are based on mutual aid as well as cooperation and support in regards to personal and professional problems, collaboration and collegiality; Norms of reciprocal support among the teachers, respect for the ideas of colleagues, receiving open and honest feedback from colleagues, words of praise for colleagues for their successes, and sharing of ideas, materials and information (Friedman, 2001). Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, (1999) have demonstrated that colleagues give a great deal of support to new teachers. They pass on a great deal of knowledge to the new teachers regarding questions of status in the school; they let them test out their ideas, prepare plans and solve problems. They reduce feelings of loneliness and uncertainty and help develop a greater sense of self-esteem.

Nevertheless, it seems that veteran teachers do not invest in explaining and clarifying the organizational norm and procedures.

So why the procedures and norms are not simply conveyed to the novice teachers?

It could be that the concealment a of the unwritten rules of school by the veteran teachers is connected to the fact that they regard the trainee teachers as a source of competition or a professional threat, and therefore they do not support them in their first steps in their teaching career. One may also assume that the veteran teachers may lead some kind of initiation ceremony (Festinger, 1961). with all the difficulties involved with it . "school Initiation" of teachers may be a rite of passage marking entrance or acceptance into the veteran group. It could

also be a formal admission to the proffessional community. In a comprehensive sense, it can also signify a transformation in which the initiate is 'reborn' into a new status.

In conclusion: the first steps in teaching are seen to be one of the most difficult periods in a teaching career. Taking the first position is seen as a most significant milestone in a teacher's professional development. Some of the difficulties experienced by novice teachers are rooted in the organizational reality and how their perception of reality.

The novice teacher in the first stages of a teaching career who experiences an organizational culture in which most components are difficult or unclear, will tend to doubt this choice of profession and even retreat from it. The very fact that at the same time the school has a mosaic of sub-cultures that very often come into conflict with one another does not make it easy at all for the trainee teacher's chosen path: commitment to a teaching career.

References

Gavish, B. (2002). **M**atching and gaps between expectations of the job and the perception of the actual work as a predictor of burnout among novice teachers. PhD Dissertation, Jerusalem: Hebrew University.

Festinger, L. (1961). The psychological effects of insufficient rewards. *American Psychologist,* 16(1), 1–11

Friedman, I. (2001). *The organizational expectations of the beginner teacher.* Henrietta Szold Institute, Jerusalem.

Friedman, I.., & Kass, E. (2002). *Teachers' self–efficacy: A classroom–organization conceptualization. Teaching and Teacher Education, 18*, 675–686.

Friedman, I., Horowitz, T., & Shaliv, R. (1988). *Effectiveness, culture and school climate.* Henrietta Szold Institute, Jerusalem.

Friedman, I., & Gavish, B. (2001). *The beginner teacher: Difficulties, support and adjustment.* Henrietta Szold Institute, Jerusalem.

Friedman, I., & Gavish, B. (2007). The teacher as an organization man: *The contribution of the work environment as perceived by the novice teacher as a predictor of burnout that the start and end of the first year of teaching. Essays on Educational Management and Organization*, 29, 55-81.

Fuller, M. and Brown, O. (1975). *Becoming a Teacher. In: K. Ryan (Ed.) Teacher Education: 14th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Part 2, pp. 25-52) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cheong, (2000) Cultural factors in school effectiveness: a framework for comparative work, *School Leadership and Management 20(2)*, 207-225.

Huberman, M.A. (1989). *The professional life cycle of teachers. Teachers College Record*, 91 (1), 31-57.

Kremer–Hayon, L., & Ben–Peretz, M. (1986). *Becoming a teacher: The transition from teachers` college to classroom life*. *International Review of Education, 32*, 413–422.

Lortie, D.C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: a sociological study*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.

Olson, M.R., & Osborne, J.W. (1991**).** *Learning to teach: The first year*. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 7*(4), 331–343.

Oplatka, Y. (2007). *Fundamentals of Education Administration – Leadership and management in an educational organization*. Pardess.

Pasternak, R. (2003). *Chapters on the sociology of education*. Raanan: Open University.

Samuel, Y. (1990), *Organizations – characteristics, structures and processes*. Haifa University Publications.

Schein, E. (1985). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Schempp, P.G, Sparkes, A.C, & Templin, T.J. (1999). Identity and induction: Establishing the self in the first years of teaching**.** In R.P. Lipka & M. Brinthaupt (Eds), *The Role of self in Teacher Development*. (pp. 142-164). Albany: State University of N.Y.

Shkedi, A. (2003). *Word that try to touch: qualitative research – theory and practice*. Tel Aviv: Ramot.

Smircich, L. (1983). Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28, 339-358.

Starhovsky, R., Marbach, A. & Hertz-Lazarovich, R. (2002). The beginner teacher: Milestones and hurdles in the first year of teaching. *Essays on Educational Management and Organization* 26, 123-156.

Julia G. Thompson, J. G. (2013). *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-to-Use Strategies, Tools and Activities for Meeting the Challenges of Each School Day,* 3rd Edition, Jossey-Bass.