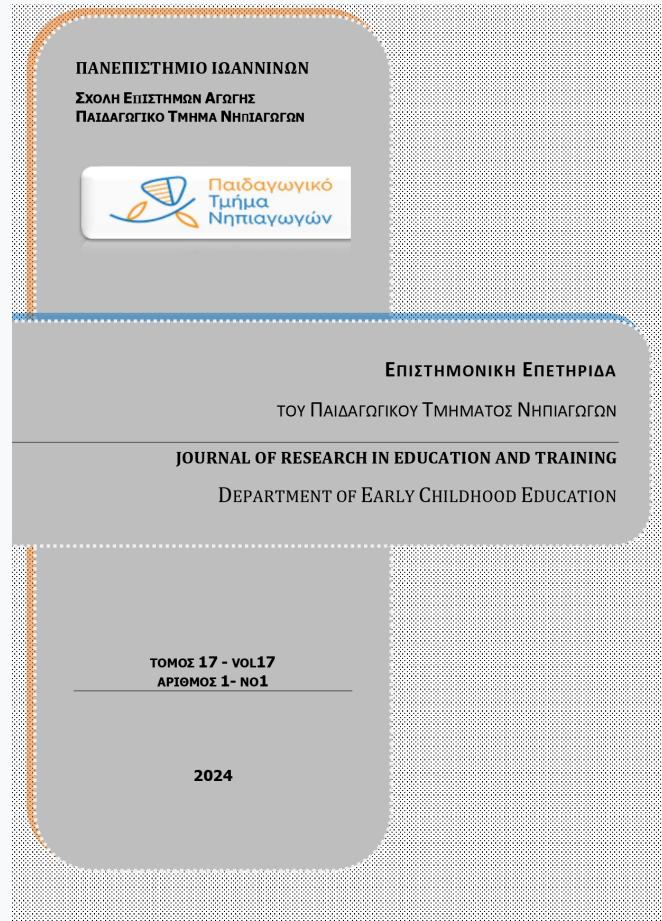


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Απόστολος Κατσικάς

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The Reception of Newly Appointed Teachers in the School Unit and Their Professional Development

Apostolos Katsikas

Department of Early Childhood Education, School of Education, University of Ioannina

Abstract

This article examines the multifaceted trajectory of newly appointed teachers, clarifying the pivotal roles of various stakeholders in their professional integration and development. It underscores the importance of a holistic approach to inducting new teachers, highlighting the difficulties of their transition from academic training to real classroom dynamics. The principal role of school principals in shaping the institutional culture, the support and professional development functions of the Teachers' Association, and the indispensable guidance offered by mentor-counselors are discussed in-depth. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the continuous nature of teacher professional development, advocating its targeted and relevant implementation, especially for new teachers. By synthesizing these perspectives, the research provides a comprehensive blueprint for educational institutions aiming to foster an environment conducive to their teaching staff's development and long-term success.

Key-words: Newly appointed teachers, educational stakeholders, professional development, induction programs, pedagogical support

Introduction

The beginning phase of a teacher's career is a critical juncture that holds the potential to shape their future trajectory in education (Sygenioti, 2018). As the vanguard of the next generation of educators, newly appointed teachers embody the latest pedagogical strategies and fresh perspectives that can revitalize academic settings (Tait, 2008). However, their reception within the school environment and the structures in place for their professional development can greatly influence their efficacy, retention, and overall contribution to the school's educational goals (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Historically, the process of integrating new educators into schools has varied in its approach. Some schools have leaned towards a 'sink or swim' method, where new teachers are given the same responsibilities as their more experienced peers without any tailored support (Lortie, 1975). Contrastingly, progressive educational institutions have started to recognize the importance of systematic onboarding processes, mentorship programs, and professional development sessions specifically tailored for those new to the profession (Wong, 2004).

The importance of this nuanced reception cannot be overstated. As Hebert and Worthy (2001) articulate, new educators' initial experiences can foster a sense of belonging and commitment or exacerbate feelings of isolation and inadequacy. The complex dynamics of school cultures, with their established norms, values, and relationships, present a labyrinth for newcomers. Without a structured reception mechanism, these teachers may struggle to navigate the educational landscape, leading to decreased job satisfaction and even early exit from the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Furthermore, members of the school community, such as the head of the school unit, the teachers' association, and mentor-counselors, play distinct roles in the professional life of a new educator (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Koutsouba, 2022; Ntourou, 2014). Each offers a different type of support, guidance, and framework for their growth. Understanding their roles and optimizing their contributions is key to harnessing the full potential of newly appointed teachers.

Newly Appointed Teachers: Facing the Challenges and Exploiting the Possibilities

The newly appointed teacher is an agent of change in the educational landscape. According to Babiniotis (2008), a newly appointed teacher is "a new teacher who has been appointed to a

public position" (p. 1.185). Having recently completed teacher education programs, these newly appointed teachers bring to the educational field new energy, current pedagogical knowledge, and innovative approaches to the classroom environment (Veenman, 1984).

However, their transition from the academic sphere to the actual classroom is accompanied by numerous challenges (Asimaki, Mylonopoulou & Vergidis, 2016; Chrysafidis, 2011; Trikas & Kasimati, 2020; Paor, 2017). Their lack of teaching experience requires intensive support from the state to smooth their integration into the educational system. According to Anthopoulou (1999), this support should include information and guidance to make them feel supported in their endeavor. A smooth integration contributes to their professional development and encourages their emotional well-being (Athanasoula-Repa et al., 1999).

The first goal for the newly appointed teacher is to adapt to the new environment. Guidance from senior colleagues is revealed to be crucial, according to Mavrogiorgos (1999). With this information, the teacher will be able to come into initial contact with the culture of the organization concerned, will try to become a member of it, and will begin to set goals which he/she will then try to implement to improve the quality of the school, which will of course result in the personal development of the teacher himself/herself. Through a properly organized reception, the newly appointed teacher will therefore be able to 'conform' to the school reality and the culture prevailing in the present school unit and will feel the obligation to offer his/her best as a member of the specific school community (Gotovos, Mavrogiorgos & Papakonstantinou, 1986).

However, the reality of the classroom may deviate from theoretical preparation. The challenges of classroom management, educating diverse student needs, and even relating to parents and colleagues require additional skills (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Newly acquired autonomy and responsibility can lead to what the scientific community calls "reality shock" (Huberman, 1993). This phase, characterized by a stark realization of the demands of the teaching profession, can be overwhelming without appropriate support. These challenges can, unfortunately, lead to high attrition rates among newly appointed teachers. A significant proportion of new teachers consider leaving the profession within the first few years due to the complex stressors they face (Ingersoll, 2001).

In conclusion, understanding the strengths and challenges of newly appointed teachers is crucial for designing strategies for their effective reception and integration into the school environment.

By capitalizing on their unique characteristics and addressing their specific needs, educational institutions can lay the foundation for long-term success and sustainability in teachers' careers.

The Role of the Principal of the School Unit

The head of a school unit, often referred to as the principal or school leader, plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of newly appointed teachers (Koutsouba, 2022; Patrikakou, 2018). His or her leadership style, vision for the school, and approach to mentoring can greatly influence the trajectory of a novice educator's career.

The organizational culture of a school, which encompasses its values, beliefs, and behaviors, is significantly influenced by the school leader (Sergiovanni, 2001). The school leader sets the tone for professional interactions, collaborative initiatives, and overall school climate. For newly appointed teachers, a supportive and inclusive culture can ease their integration into the school community and provide a sense of belonging (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

A principal's goal should still be to create an environment where all teachers are active members and take the initiative for the actions to be taken in the school. Creating this environment will significantly contribute to the development of productivity within the organization. Thus, the new teacher after getting to know the culture of the specific school will immediately try to become an active member of the teachers' association which will contribute significantly to his/her actions (Ubben et al., 2004).

Newly appointed teachers may sometimes face challenges that require intervention at the administrative level, such as conflicts with parents or issues with resources. The school leader, in such cases, acts as the teacher's advocate, ensuring that the teacher's rights are protected and that they have the necessary resources to perform their duties effectively (Blase & Blase, 2002). At the same time, managers can also provide various facilitation to the newcomers, such as class selection, to make their integration smoother (Goodwin, 2012).

The school principal should function as a leader and have a dynamic character so that new teachers feel that they have strong support in their workplace, which will be a source of strength in their professional development. As Everard and Morris (1996) typically state, the school principal influences new teachers because he or she is the point of reference for school life as well as a source of guidance and information throughout their professional career. Therefore, having the school principal as a beacon, newly appointed teachers will be able to overcome the

stress and difficulties they will encounter at the beginning of their professional careers and will begin to function independently, trying to offer their best for the school unit to function effectively and achieve the desired results (Eraut, 1994).

It therefore shows that the role of the principal in modern schools is a reference point for the subsequent development of newly appointed teachers in their professional careers. The importance of the role of the principal of a school unit about newly appointed teachers is aptly pointed out by Weise and Holland (1992, in Anthopoulou, 1999) in their suggestions where they state that:

- The principal must convey to the newly appointed teachers the requirements he or she has of them.*
- The principal must make special plans for the learning needs of the first-time appointees and anticipate the availability of time to carry out this plan.*
- The principal must help new appointees set personal career goals, supervise the progress toward achieving those goals, and offer assistance in that direction.*
- The principal should set an example of cooperative professional behavior for new hires (p. 52).*

In conclusion, the role of the school principal in the professional journey of a newly appointed teacher is multifaceted. From shaping the school's culture to ensuring continuous professional development and offering support during challenges, the leader's influence is profound and far-reaching.

The Role of the Teachers' Association

The smooth integration of a newly appointed teacher into the educational society, as has been mentioned above, must be planned by an organized society mechanism and then supported by the school community of which the new teacher becomes a member. In addition to the presence of the school principal, the support of the newly appointed teacher by the Teachers' Association should be important (Anthopoulou, 1999).

Being a part of a teachers' association offers new educators the chance to interact with colleagues, veteran teachers, and experts in the field. Such interactions can lead to valuable opportunities for mentoring and collaboration. Building a robust professional network can

provide newly appointed teachers with a community to which they can turn for advice, resources, and support (Lieberman & Mace, 2010).

The Teachers' Association may also provide legal advice and support to their members. For newly appointed teachers who may be unfamiliar with the legal aspects of their role or who might face challenging situations such as disputes or disciplinary action, this legal support is considered particularly important (Goldstein, 2014).

In addition, many Teachers' Associations organize conferences, workshops, and training sessions aimed at continuous professional development. These events often include expert speakers, innovative teaching methodologies, and networking opportunities that can be particularly beneficial for novice educators seeking to expand their skills and professional network (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

In conclusion, the Teachers' Association plays a multifaceted role in supporting and empowering newly appointed teachers. By providing professional development opportunities, a sense of community, and legal support, it contributes significantly to the success and well-being of novice educators.

The Role of the Mentor-Counselor

In the realm of education, the mentor-counselor stands as a beacon for newly appointed teachers, guiding them through the intricate pathways of pedagogical practices and the social dynamics of a school environment. Drawing upon their reservoirs of experience, these seasoned educators offer a depth of pedagogical knowledge that helps to bridge the gap between the theory-laden environment of teacher training programs and the challenging realities of day-to-day classroom dynamics. In this context, the mentor-counselor should act as a companion in the developmental journey of the newly appointed teacher (Vlachidi & Papageorgiou, 2013), with the reciprocity of this relationship transforming this guidance into a shared journey of discovery and development for both (Ambrosetti, 2014).

Collaborative lesson planning, classroom observations, and post-lesson reflective discussions serve as some of the many avenues through which mentor-counselors share knowledge about effective teaching strategies and classroom management. However, their role transcends the purely academic sphere. Recognizing that the commencement of a teaching career can be emotionally taxing, mentor-counselors extend their support into the socio-emotional realm. They

provide a shoulder to lean on, helping new teachers grapple with the stress of the profession, find a balance between their work and personal lives, and cultivate resilience in the face of setbacks (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Furthermore, as ambassadors of culture and community, mentor-counselors play a crucial role in acclimating new teachers to the culture of the school and its wider community. They provide insights into the community's values, expectations, and nuances, ensuring that new teachers can form meaningful connections and engage effectively with their environment (Wang & Odell, 2002).

The institution of the mentor is of great importance for the effective functioning of a school unit, because through this institution the empirical knowledge of an experienced teacher is transferred to a newly appointed teacher to ensure the proper functioning of the organization (McNamara, 1995). This experiential transfer begins when a new teacher is introduced to the organization, where the mentor offers guidance and support to adjust to the school environment and the actual classroom dynamics. Then, the mentor monitors the newly appointed teacher's teaching and, through constructive advice, helps him or her face any weaknesses (Anthopoulou, 1999).

The relationship that develops between mentor and mentee becomes stronger and more meaningful over time. This relationship is built on mutual respect and collegiality. This strong bond that develops between the two parts of the school unit is the key factor that contributes to the effective functioning of the mentor institution, aiming at the smooth integration and guidance of the newly appointed teacher in his/her professional environment (Mavrogiorgos, 1999).

To be effectively integrated into his/her role, the mentor must embody the ideal characteristics of a senior adult educator, fully meeting the requirements for communication, collaboration, and inspiration for the newly appointed teacher. This means solving challenges effectively, taking initiatives, finding alternatives to impasses, and evaluating and self-assessing his/her contribution to education (Kokkos, 2003). In addition, the mentor's ability to coordinate, communicate interpersonally and respect the individual differences and needs of newly appointed teachers, connecting the educational curriculum with the social environment, are necessary requirements (Kokkos, 2004).

In conclusion, the role of the mentor-counselor is multifaceted and particularly demanding (Sygenioti, 2018), combining pedagogical guidance with emotional support, ensuring the smooth integration of new teachers in the professional environment and their effective development.

The Professional Development of Teachers

Professional development is especially crucial in the early stages of a teacher's career. Newly appointed teachers, often transition from theoretical programs to the reality of classrooms and face distinct challenges that necessitate targeted professional growth opportunities. This development is pivotal not just for individual success but for fostering a generation of teachers prepared for contemporary challenges in education.

New teachers frequently grapple with classroom management, differentiating instruction, integrating technology, and navigating the cultural and socio-emotional dynamics of their students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). They often seek strategies to build relationships with students, families, and colleagues, as well as deal with the pressures of assessment and accountability (Wong, 2004).

The professional development of teachers can be achieved through different methods. Firstly, through constructive cooperation with experienced colleagues, teachers can exchange views on methods that will significantly improve their teaching. Through this collaboration, teachers enrich their knowledge and gain more experience which will help them to manage difficult situations that will arise in their classroom (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1995). Another way in which teachers can develop professionally is by creating learning communities within the organization where all teachers through interaction with each other will research and discover modern and effective teaching methods. Within these communities, they can share challenges, co-plan lessons and develop shared resources, reducing feelings of isolation and quickly expanding their toolkit of strategies (Vescio et al., 2008). The school principal is responsible for creating these communities and teachers must be active members to enable them to raise their quality level. Finally, the development of teachers can be achieved through various trainings which are implemented inside or outside the school (Asimaki et al., 2016; Dulkeridou, 2017). This training should be organized and designed by experienced people to benefit teachers and aim at their development to become more effective in their work (Athanasoula-Repa et al., 1999). These trainings should focus on specific areas such as classroom management, technology integration, or special education strategies. These trainings can provide hands-on experiences and actionable strategies for immediate classroom application (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Newly appointed teachers at the beginning of their professional career should have as a future goal their quality upgrade. However, older teachers should also have the same goal because the rapid changes that have occurred in education in recent years have also affected the way schools

operate. To be adequate, teachers must adapt to these changes by following methods that will result in their professional development. The support of newly appointed teachers, the development of a culture of cooperation within the organization, and the continuous training of teachers are directly linked to the professional development of teachers (Mavrogiorgos, 1999).

The professional development of new teachers is a strategic investment in the future of education. By addressing their unique needs and providing them with personalized support paves the way for a generation of teachers who are not only effective but also resilient and deeply committed to the noble profession of teaching.

Conclusions

The educational landscape is full of challenges and opportunities, especially for newly appointed teachers. As mentioned above, the integration and development of these teachers play a pivotal role in determining not only their success but also the overall success of the educational institution and its student populace.

Understanding the dynamics and unique requirements of new teachers is paramount. Their nascent experiences can be enhanced with the right introduction and support, ensuring a smoother transition from academic theory to classroom practice. The challenges they face, from classroom management to understanding the diverse needs of their students, can be mitigated by having appropriate support structures in place.

The role of the various stakeholders in this integration process cannot be overstated. School leaders must create an environment conducive to professional development and open dialogue. Principals can set the tone for the experiences of new teachers, influencing their job satisfaction, retention, and overall professional development. Furthermore, the Teachers' Association provides a collective voice and advocacy, ensuring that the concerns and needs of new teachers are adequately represented and addressed. Its function extends beyond representation, serving as a hub for professional development through training, conferences, and networking opportunities. Finally, the role of the Mentor-Counselor, as clarified, is eminently important for bridging the gap between theory and practice. His/her guidance aids new teachers in navigating classroom intricacies, while also providing emotional support and professional knowledge.

A commitment to continuous professional development remains a constant thread throughout a teacher's career. For new teachers, in particular, targeted and relevant professional development opportunities can significantly enhance their skills, confidence, and adaptability in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

In summation, the holistic development and successful integration of newly appointed teachers is a collaborative endeavor, which requires the concerted efforts of various stakeholders. By understanding and acknowledging the multifaceted nature of this process, educational institutions can pave the way for a generation of teachers who are not only effective in their roles but also deeply committed to the noble pursuit of the education of the future.

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