



Multidisciplinary Approach to Exploration of Teacher Professional Development: Drawing on the Perspectives from Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology

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Abstract

It is recognised nationally and within the broader European context, that the first year of professional practice of teachers, also known as an induction year, has far reaching implications for their subsequent teaching career. The literature on teacher retention, development and learning in the early years of the profession highlights that early attrition can be associated with a number of factors, such as professional experiences of teachers in schools, their attitude to pre-service education, their personal characteristics, field experiences of teacher preparation programmes and past schooling experiences.

This paper reports on the systematic enquiry of empirical and analytical nature into the experiences of newly qualified teachers in primary schools in Ireland in their early professional socialisation. In particular, the paper will discuss how drawing on a wide range of theoretical models within this national study (eg. social learning approach, developmental stage chronology theories, professional growth perspective) teachers' professional socialisation was conceptualised as the process by which teachers acquire knowledge and skills associated with their profession and through which they become members of the occupation of teaching. Three dimensions of the constructed framework of professional socialisation will be discussed: technical, social and structural/cultural. Secondly, I will report on the collected empirical evidence in relation to the following research questions: i) What are the most frequent aspects of socialisation experiences encountered by teachers in their first year of teaching and ii) Teachers' self- image and identity at work. The findings of the study have implications not only for initial teacher preparation, but also for teacher professional development. The results for example mirrored the ones from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (2009) that mentors in most cases were the most supportive advisers in sharing professional knowledge with new teachers. Importantly, there was little evidence that the relational aspect of teachers' work constituted a significant problem in the first year. The primary objective of this research was to enrich our understanding about the origins of teachers' concerns, their experiences on entry to the first teaching job from the perspectives of challenges encountered within classroom teaching, their learning of new occupational roles and establishment of interpersonal relationships with parents and colleagues. In light of the research questions and cognisant of the theoretical and methodological approaches of previous research, a case study approach with mixed methods design was adopted. An 'embedded' design (Yin, 2009) was used, which meant that the data was derived from a number of cases or multiple elements. The data was collected by means of a postal questionnaire administered to a sample of 1635 from both, the B.Ed and H.Dip (primary) degree programmes. Additionally, 52 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 newly qualified teachers in their first year of teaching.