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Chronological and Hierarchical Focusing on Constructing a Professional Website: Meeting the Induction Needs of Newly Qualified Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The induction period is a very important time in the career of a teacher and has a long-term influence on the teachers' professional development. This preliminary research presents the first results of an extensive project – discovering if and how the construction of a professional website is able to meet the diverse needs of three different groups of potential users of the website. By conducting a reflective journey and investigating different sources of data we started to better understand the potential of technology integration to create a learning/teaching community of teachers. First findings point toward additional directions to continue and develop the professional website. It also offers several suggestions about sections that should widen and expand and new sections that have to be invented.

KEYWORDS: *Newly qualified teachers, Community of teachers, Professional website knowledge society, Professional development, Mentors, Learning/teaching community*

Chronological and Hierarchical Background

The purpose of this presentation is to conduct a *reflective journey* and to investigate the constructing of a *professional website* for beginning teachers (Yaffe, 2003) in order to learn about the best means, modes and tactics to continue the implementation of change with the help of this project of construction, enable the *technology integration* in education and create a *community of teachers*. The 21-century is dwelt, in Europe and Israel and in other parts of the world by an Information Society. People in general and teachers in particular are supposed to work in the Internet environment, to use information and become a *knowledge society* as Toffler describes it in the last decade of the 20-century (Toffler, 1991). Such a society will invest more in teaching and learning. Every teacher has to adapt new technical tools that will change frequently. We need to teach the future teachers a new and complicate role – the role of the teacher in a connected world in which the children of the N-Gen (Net – Generation) as Passig describes it (Passig, 2003) are growing up with the world's resources available to them almost anytime, anywhere. Teachers and especially NQTs need the same resources and availability and a professional website can nurture and address these needs of time, place and content.

We will present a preliminary research, the first results of a case study in which we will attend to our footprints and discover what are the most important and useful sections of the website and identify the potential arenas to nurture partnerships and collaborations in the induction year. This research will enable us to better integrate the professional website in the induction process (Yaffe, 2003). The teaching induction website (www.education.gov.il/staj) opens a window into the world of kindergarten and school teachers at the beginning of their careers as educators. The internship year, the first year of teaching, is a very complex year. It is a year when theory meets practice. Induction is an essential process for teachers' *professional development* as it provides them with support and feedback from their tutors, internship workshop facilitators and officials in the education system. The website offers supplementary materials. The teaching induction website is where student teachers can shift their attitude and improve their skills from *learning to teach* to *being a teacher*; this is recognized as a serious and significant challenge. The on-line community includes NQTs, their mentors from the schools and kindergarten, induction coordinators and other officials from the Ministry of Education that are connected with the Induction programme. The online forums are effective ways to exchange opinions and ideas and develop a professional space of shared language and knowledge.

Two years ago, after five years of developing the website according to the declared needs of NQT as we, the constructing team (one induction coordinator and two expert tutors), identified them; we decided to investigate other relevant point of views, the NQTs' way of working and functioning, the mentors needs and others 'surfers', teachers with different range of interest. We started a case study aiming to focus hierarchically on the development of this professional website in order to discover discrepancies between what we understood and the authentic needs of the different stakeholders of the website and find the best ways to continue this project.

Bridging the discrepancies – the research questions

In order to emphasize the need to evaluate the relevancy of the professional website we started to investigate these research questions:

- What are the needs of the NQTs from their point of view?
- What are the special perspectives of the mentors that support the NQTs?
- How can the Induction Coordinators contribute to the professional website?
- What are the most popular sections of the website and why?

Method

It is a case study that examines the nature of the professional website chronologically from the stage of concept to the very close details of the relevancy of different sections, to the continuation of improving and constructing new links and potential arenas that can develop into a learning/teaching community. Parallel to the chronology investigation we examine the website hierarchically from three

points of view: the NQTs, the mentors and the induction coordinators.

Sources of data

1. Formal semi-structured interviews with ten Newly Qualified Teachers
2. Informal 'virtual discussions' in the active forums of the website with mentors
3. Protocols of meetings with 37-42 induction coordinators on a national level
4. Statistical data about the most visited pages of the website

Procedure

- a - Planning and constructing the website for five years
- b - Upgrading the website to be the official website of the Ministry of Education
- c - Constructing an interview agenda
- d - Documenting the data from the different sources
- e - Analyzing the nature of website assisted practice
- f - Preliminary findings – identifying the complex needs of NQTs; introduction to the different needs of the mentors and opening a new interaction with the veteran induction coordinators.

Preliminary findings

When we started to analyse the data, the first findings pointed at some basic facts that we already knew intuitively but it felt better to know that it was right to take that direction. Other findings were a real revelation for us and we will have to change sections and add new ones. The professional website can become an important vehicle in developing teachers. Providing technological innovations, it can enrich the pedagogical repertoire of many beginning teachers (Goldfarb, 2002). Above all it seems that conditions have to emerge in which teachers are encouraged to contribute towards the development of information databases like this professional website. The various modes of ICT may need to be integrated with one another, so that a meaningful volume of information can be generated in the minimum possible time.

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