

# 'No One Has Asked Me But I Have Something to Offer': New Teachers' Experience-Based 'Ten Commandments' Designed for Optimal Induction into School of New Teachers

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## Abstract

This paper discusses practical recommendations of new teachers after one-three years of teaching at school. They want to offer these recommendations to new teachers during the first year of their induction process at school. The study was conducted according to the qualitative research method and the participants were 128 new teachers. The research was based on reflective diaries which were content analysed as is customary in qualitative research. The research findings illustrated that the new teachers demonstrated more optimism than frustration. They formulated ten recommendations for the optimal absorption of new teachers at school. The research recommendation is to include these practical advices in the support and mentoring programme of new teachers at school.

**Keywords:** new teachers, induction into teaching, new teachers absorption

## 1. Introduction

There are various support and absorption programmes designed for optimal induction of new teachers. These programmes aim to prevent difficulties and dropout, putting an emphasis on preventive rather than therapeutic handling method (Gilad & Alkalay, 2011). Nevertheless, the dropout rates of new teachers in the first year of their work in the education system ranges between 30%-40% (Arbiv-Eliashiv & Zimmerman, 2013; Cochran-Smith, McQuillan, Mitchell, Terrell, Barnatt, D'Souza, & Gleeson, 2012; Ingresoll & Strong, 2011).

The main claim explored in this paper is that, in addition to the support and induction programmes, it is important to learn from the experience of the new teachers who are the target population of this support. Even if their experience as teachers is short, they have something to offer. It is essential to comprehend their professional, pedagogical and self-knowledge which they have accumulated and which they have translated into applied knowledge as structured and clear principles within the comprehensive support setup. This pedagogical-practical knowledge might facilitate new teachers' professional and personal development, better absorption and reduced rates of dropout from the education system. Moreover, similarly to every new practice, in teaching too educational practitioners encounter difficulties. However, we should empower their advantages as new teachers who have just completed their education in academic institutions.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1 New Teachers*

According to the research literature, the world of new teachers is filled with struggle and survival (Fenwick, 2011; Gilad & Alkalay, 2011). With their induction into the education system they are depicted by images and metaphors such as: 'wilted flowers', 'jumping into the cold water' and 'trying to survive in the battlefield' (Shimoni, Gonen, & Yaakovi, 2006; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

New teachers face unexpected problems and situations which they find hard to handle (Gilad & Alkalay, 2011). They are required to exercise simultaneous judgments, decision-making and multi-dimensional solutions while coping with developing class events and learning events (Kennedy, 2006). Furthermore, new teachers have to be acquainted with and understand the school's organisational culture. Being familiar with the school as an educational organisation might be time-saving and navigate their conduct as new teachers towards the right channels in an efficient and effective manner (Samuel, 1996; Senge, 1997).

New teachers join the education system with a sense of vocation, readiness to implement the theories they have studied and a wish to apply the tools and competences they have acquired during the teacher education programme. However, in everyday life, this sense of vocation is pushed aside. The teachers begin adopting properties considered positive and desirable from the viewpoint of the system, putting an emphasis on 'what should be' and/or 'what should be done'. Attempting to survive, they renounce in fact their uniqueness and sometimes even their 'credo'. Social psychology refers to this behaviour as social desirability. In this state of social desirability, people tend to relate to themselves by qualities and descriptions which they believe are accepted by the entire society, acting upon them (Helses & Holden, 2003).

Another important factor is the gender-oriented aspect of new teachers. When they begin their career, most of the teachers engage also in building their family, married life and children. These two circles necessitate extensive investment and are energy- and time-consuming in the teaching/learning processes as well as in building the family. This fact is greatly strengthened, intensified and problematic since this mainly concerns new female-teachers. They find themselves in an inner dissonance, trying to succeed both at work

and in their family (Gilad, 2014; Pearson, 2007).

## *2.2 Induction into Teaching*

Various studies (Fenwick, 2011; Gilad & Alkalay, 2011) stipulate that new teachers function in a world of struggle and survival. Many of them try coping with a new reality which for them differs from the reality they have known during their internship (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). New teachers who deal with these processes face the reality shock, uncertainty and 'walking in the dark'. They deal with unexpected problems and complex situations (Gilad & Alkalay, 2011; Winstead & Betweens, 2007). Moreover, they are concerned with survival in the system and are preoccupied with mastering the learning material, planning the teaching, familiarising themselves with school as an educational organisation as well as being accepted by the staff, the pupils and the parents. Hence, only after achieving a sense of confidence at school and recognising school as an educational institution, will the new teachers find the time to improve their professional performance (Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Samuel, 2005; Senge, 2008).

The new teachers arrive to school whose staff is more experienced than them. It is only natural that they meet an existing reality and have to be integrated into it. The initial need is to get acquainted with the environment and the procedures of the system which they enter. At the same time, they have unique needs due to the very fact of being new. They require encouragement and empathy, a sense of belonging and real-time answers to their questions. Moreover, they want school to acknowledge their ability to prove themselves without being inhibited (Gilad & Alkalay, 2011).

Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (1996) specifies that the adjustment stages of new teachers are similar to those of immigrants. The new teachers have to be adjusted to unknown organisational norms and decrypt internal codes of the organisation. Thus, during their first year of practice, new teachers move from the stage of teacher education to the stage of teaching in practice. This involves complex processes of socialisation and de-socialisation, while embracing components of the school organisational culture. Being unaware of the school culture features, regulations and job requirement entails a sense of helplessness and a weakened self-esteem.

## *2.3 Absorbing New Teachers during Their Induction to Teaching Process*

The support and absorption programmes attempt to facilitate optimal absorption of new teachers into the education system. These programmes differ from one country to another. Three major partners constitute a prerequisite for the success of these programmes: policy makers, teacher education institutions and schools. However, it is important to point out that the responsibility for the new teachers' successful absorption is incumbent not only on the absorbing systems but also on the new teachers themselves as absorbed teaching practitioners (Gilad & Alkalay, 2011).

During the 1970s, support programmes for new teachers at school were implemented in the United States. The programmes introduced for example in Missouri, Wisconsin and Florida illustrate the importance of support, sharing and attention to new teachers' needs. Moreover, they attribute importance to the consolidation of a supportive staff that consists not only of

colleagues but also of head teachers and management members (Wilkinson, 1997). Research of induction into teaching programmes in New Zealand (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, 2008) highlights the need for developing new teachers' specialisation. The objective is to promote pupils' learning and not merely support the teachers' survival and respond to pressure factors of the new and demanding work by counselling and mentoring.

Another important element of these programmes is having head teachers and mentors act as role models and leverage for change. Moreover, the school culture should provide the new teachers with tutoring and space for talking about their professional life and being part of the school organisation (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). New teachers in Japan attend guidance programmes of senior mentors and teachers. These programmes underscore the importance of collaborating with experienced teachers as well as allocating time and place for reflection processes (Howe, 2006). A study conducted in Germany (Richter, Lüdtke, Klusmann, Anders & Baumert, 2013), which investigated new mathematics teachers, recommends choosing teacher-mentors in a mindful way. The researchers argue that support provided only when new teachers need it might be more appropriate than a close and continuous mentoring.

Ingresoll and Strong (2011) reviewed 15 empirical studies conducted during the 1980s which emphasised the effects of support and absorption programmes on new teachers. According to the researchers, most of the studies indicate that supporting new teachers has a positive impact from the following aspects: commitment to and perseverance with the profession, improvement of teaching methods and improvement of pupils' attainments. However, supporting these aspects is insufficient. Hence, schools should be an educational environment whereby new teachers can learn the profession and succeed in it.

Studies conducted by social networks in Britain investigated the issue of attention to the voice of new teachers. These studies indicated the significance of peer relations based on trust, mutual understanding and collective responsibility. New teachers pointed out that they were interested in maintaining contacts with appreciated colleagues also outside the school (Fox & Wilson, 2008). Support programmes in the computerised era empower the new teachers who are connected to social network communities. These teachers do not feel isolated and the networks enable them to conduct a professional and social discourse which enhances their professional development and improves their teaching (Baker-Doyle, 2012). Moreover, Baker-Doyle (2012) underscores that the most important component in the new teachers' support sources are the colleagues at school as well as the wider teacher community.

Desimone, Hochberg, Porter, Polikoff, Schwartz and Johnson (2014) argue that the integration of formal and informal mentoring complement each other and may improve the mentoring process. In Israel a support and mentoring programme is being implemented for three years: the year of internship and two additional years. It mainly aims to support, empower and respond to the unique personal needs of each and every teacher (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Gilad and Alkalay (2011) stipulate that the new teachers need support and counselling in every aspect of their practice: personal, professional and social. The researchers indicate that the new teachers search support sources outside the school (e.g. support and mentoring setup, family and friends) as well as sources within the school (e.g. experienced teachers, staff room and

professional staff). They expect that their co-workers – both colleagues and management - acknowledge support and appreciate the efforts that they invest in their work. Al-Dor (2010) specifies the significance of the systemic approach for a better absorption of new teachers. This approach relates to all the system components such as: training the mentors and the school for absorbing interns and new teachers.

The reviewed studies offer empirical findings associated with the claim that support and assistance of new teachers have a positive impact on them.

### *2.4 Research Question*

What are the practical recommendations of new teachers after a 1-3 years' experience for the optimal absorption at school of new teachers who have just began their work?

## **3. Methodology**

This study was conducted according to the qualitative approach and constitutes a case study. Using the qualitative approach facilitates comprehension, description and interpretation of the events occurring in the field. It also includes the covert aspects from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. One of the major advantages of this type of research is its ability to offer insights about occurrences in the real contexts and situations in which they happen. The case study is inductive since it presents the data out of the situation independently of the assumptions. Moreover, it enables expression of situations from different perspectives (Shkedi, 2012).

### *3.1 Research Population*

The research population consisted of 128 new teachers. All of them participated in a support and absorption project and worked at elementary and secondary schools at the south of Israel in both the Jewish and Arab, secular and orthodox sectors.

### *3.2 Research Tools*

The study was grounded in 128 reflective diaries written by the new teachers in the course of their work at school throughout the last school year. The new teachers documented the entirety of the situations and interactions in their class, the staff room and other spaces at school as they experienced them or were involved in them.

### *3.3 Data Processing*

The data obtained from the reflective diaries were content analysed as is prevalent in qualitative research. The content analysis was performed at two levels: normative content analysis for identifying prominent trends and qualitative-interpretive content analysis for exposing essences, perceptions and comprehension of various insights. At the first stage initial categories and topics which were recurrent during the categorisation process were chosen in order to re-organise them and attribute meanings to the data. At the second stage, the data was analysed according to the categories defined by the researcher. The key categories tie together all the relevant categories in order to present the insights into the investigated phenomenon (Shkedi, 2012).

## 4. Results

The research findings illustrate that new teachers, even if they have only a 1-3 years' teaching experience, they have practical recommendations for new teachers who have just now started teaching. Most of the new teachers (approximately 93%) are rather optimistic than frustrated. They believe they have the professional ability to affect educational and social processes at school and shape the pupils' personality. Moreover, the new teachers know that surprises may emerge in the teaching and learning processes and they are not always ready for or aware of them. Indeed, absorption at school during the first year is not easy but it is challenging and constitutes for them a developing and growing learning journey.

Below are the 'Ten Commandments' from new teachers, based on their experience, to new teachers. The Commandments were written in the "do's and don'ts" style.

### *4.1 Being New Teachers Is the Source of Your Power*

You should remember that you have just left the academic institutions. You are up-to-date with new theories, advanced teaching methods and alternative assessment methods. The 'kit' which you carry with you comprises a lot of practical-professional-pedagogical knowledge. Find the proper ways for implementing it for the good of the teaching process and the learners' promotion.

A: 'You don't realise what you bring with you to school. Experienced teachers can learn from you. You have learnt a lot and have acquired knowledge and competences. Use them professionally and modestly'.

### *4.2 Know Yourselfes*

You have to know yourselves, your strong and weak points. You certainly have abilities and skills of which you are not always aware. Map and apply them in your interaction with the pupils, teachers and parents. Follow your heart but also your mind and adhere to your beliefs and values.

A: 'Be yourselves, without masks, be sure of yourselves, understand that not all people are perfect. We all make mistakes because we are human and that it our advantage, knowing to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them'.

### *4.3 The First Impression Is the Best Impression*

You have to make the best impression when you first come to school. It is not a secret that the first impression determines a lot for what is about to transpire. Remember that both pupils and teachers 'scan' you for better or for worse. Pay attention to your way of speaking and dressing as well as to your body language.

A: 'Pay attention to the way you say things, your tone of speech, formulating your sentences, the way you address the parents, pupils, colleagues, school secretary, caretaker, head teacher. Smile, be well groomed'.

B: 'Ask yourselves what type of teacher you want the pupils to see in you. The friendly? The

tough? The one whose lesson can be disrupted? These are things which learners immediately notice. You will find it very difficult to change this first impression later'.

#### *4.4 Be Professional*

Be professional in everything you do at school. When you come into the classroom on your first day, define the code of behavior to the pupils, what is allowed and what is prohibited. In class you will face various types of disciplinary problems. Be very patient, do not allow the pupils to undermine your confidence in your ability to teach. Be nice but at the same time assertive and set clear boundaries for the pupils. Be consistent in your reactions and the way you handle disciplinary problems. In addition to managing the class, it is essential to be specialised in the subject you are teaching, creating a learning experience for the pupils. Do not be afraid to teach in an original and unique way. Empower the pupils' successes and challenge them with a deep approach to learning. Be on time when entering the classroom, filling in forms and scoring and assessing. Do not forget to attend in-service training courses because you will always learn something new and creative which you have not known until now.

A: 'You will undoubtedly encounter various types of difficulties throughout the first year. Two major difficulties are managing the class and having to cope with and teach the learnt material. The investment starts by preparing an interesting and challenging lesson. Making the pupils internalise the material rather than only writing it down. This takes hours but with time you will learn to manage the time in a beneficial way'.

#### *4.5 Remember That School Is an Organisation*

It is essential to get acquainted and familiarised with the school culture. There are job holders and hierarchy at school and it is important to respect each and every employee. Be loyal to the system and collegial to the people working in it.

A: 'Don't ignore authorities. If you have a problem with your lessons timetable, contact first the lessons plan coordinator and don't by-pass her or him. If you have a problem with anyone, talk to him or her and not about them. Don't gossip about one of your colleagues behind their back because they will hear about it. The principle of "a little bird will tell them" always applies'.

B: 'It is important to take part in school events. These events reinforce your sense of belonging as new teachers and tighten your contacts with the professional team and the school staff'.

#### *4.6 Learn thoroughly the Pupils' World*

Make a habit of talking every day about 10 minutes with one of the pupils and not only when problems arise. During the first month of the school year you will have talked with all the pupils. You should do this in order to learn their strengths and weaknesses as well as their preferred topics and hobbies. Try manifesting a personal attitude and listen to their voice. Thus you will gradually build trust relations with your pupils and win their sympathy and appreciation.

A: 'In my opinion the most important feature of being a teacher is knowing to establish relations with the pupils. A personal and warm relation. Remember that even behind the naughtiest or 'disturbed' child hides a child with a big soul. There is a proverb in Hebrew which says: "Those who sow in tears reap in joy". Try and you will not regret it'.

#### *4.7 Learn to Give Credit to Others*

Try giving credit to pupils and colleagues and appreciate their actions. See the good side and express it by words or deeds in order to emphasise how glad you are for them and for their worthy qualities. Remember that giving credit is encouraging, shows trust in people and in their ability to succeed and be happy. Giving credit can be also self-oriented. Hence, do not forget to give credit to yourselves for your educational practice.

A: 'Giving someone credit is important. Children usually make troubles and we are angry with them. However, not less important is to compliment children when they are well-behaved, say a kind word and update the parents'.

#### *4.8 The Shamefast Man Cannot Learn (a Hebrew proverb)*

Consult your colleagues at work. Learn from them and share with them your knowledge. Ask them to assist you with learning materials such as tests and worksheets. However, the fact that you are new teachers does not exempt you from preparing your own learning materials and involving your colleagues in them.

A: 'Find a teacher with whom you can get connected and who you can involve without any fear. Someone who knows to alleviate your pressure, to encourage. Someone who knows to compliment and has an optimistic view of the school reality. Hearing kind words is the best way to avoid negative thoughts'.

#### *4.9 Use a Sense of Humour*

Humour is an effective tool which benefits the teaching and the atmosphere in class. The teaching offers situations whereby you can introduce a humourous sentence or a story which is relevant to the learnt material or the class climate. Nevertheless, avoid offending the pupils. Consequently you should know all the pupils very well before addressing a humouristic remark to them.

A: 'Prepare ahead of time stories and jokes relevant to the topic of the lesson and make sure that they are suitable to the pupils' world and to the class atmosphere'.

#### *4.10 Be a Role Model*

There is nothing similar to personal example. The support sources which you get can assist you in your teaching. However, being a role model depends only on you. Remember that the eyes of the pupils are constantly set on you and you can definitely serve as a role model for the inculcation of values, good manners and deep approach to learning.

A: 'Your day-by-day behaviour is tested and internalised by the pupils. If through your behaviour you materialise the values which you wish to deliver to the pupils, they learn them



better than by talking about them in class'.

To sum up, the new teachers believe it is important not to be despaired or give up. The statistics related to new teachers' dropout is high. If you decided to engage in this profession out of love - do not allow anyone to ruin it for you. There are difficult moments but learn not to take everything personally. With time you will learn that although you aspire to attain perfection, the reality is never perfect. Even if you invest maximum efforts, you will not always achieve maximum success.

A: 'Many of us tend to judge ourselves with a critical eye. During the first year of teaching you will always face failures and disappointments. The question is how you look at them. You should see the successes and the strong points of your practice. Acknowledge your mistakes with understanding and love, using them to grow and develop'.

If you have decided to stick to teaching, **Welcome new teachers!**. You have reached the real world filled with motivation and vocation. This is the world of rebellious children, children with ADHD, sometimes impertinent, glued the whole day to the 'third generation' screens and they certainly do not make life easy for you. Nevertheless this is also a magical world of clever children, capable of rapid comprehension, thirsty for challenges as well as for a kind word, personal attitude, respect. Children who know that we believe in them and give them hope that they can succeed and materialise their vocation in life. Be proud of the way you have chosen – to educate and influence the generation of tomorrow.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The research findings illustrate that the new teachers express more optimism than frustration. They conceived ten recommendations for an optimal absorption of new teachers at school. They are aware of the difficulties but underscore that the journey of induction into school is a complex and challenging process.

According to the data published by the OECD (2013), improving an educational system consists of several stages with an emphasis on the quality of the teachers and the learning outcomes. Every stage of this journey has its own emphases and rules and if we want to generate a change we have to consider the proper activities for every stage. Based on the research findings, it is highly important to cope with the first year difficulties typical of the first stage of the induction into teaching. These difficulties are more related to the personal aspect. For example, new teachers expect hearing a kind word and appreciation. Moreover, they want the school management to listen to their unique needs as well as to use their ability and wish to contribute to school. Studies show that new teachers come to work with high motivation and with the perception that teaching is a vocation (Helmes & Holden, 2003; Malach-Piness, 2011). Gilad and Alkalay (2011) found that it is essential to identify and map the needs, abilities and powers of new teachers for the purpose of good absorption at school. Integrating a support and absorption programme, mapping the new teachers' needs and abilities as well as the absorbing system's awareness of their motivation and sense of vocation can assist them to become more professional and effective teachers.

In the context of class management and interaction with the pupils, it is essential already from

the first lesson to finalize with them the 'psychological agreement' which defines the beliefs, principles, rules and modes of conduct in the lessons. Obholzer and Zagier (1994) maintain that every organisation should define the main task, the way of accomplishing the goals, the vision, the values. Furthermore, it is important to define the mutual expectations of the teachers and pupils and persevere in them in a consistent and assertive way (Whitener, 2001).

New teachers point out that pupils appreciate teachers who use humour during the lessons. Humour can improve the class atmosphere, evoking intellectual pleasure, developing creative thinking and consolidating teachers' status as accepted class leaders (Sover, 2009; Zamir, 2007). Pupils expect from their teachers a kind word and appreciation for their positive performance. Positive assessment enables teachers to conduct a dialog with their pupils, based on trust in their ability to function as responsible pupils and thus to lead them to an experiential and meaningful learning (Evans, 1996).

Another finding highlights that acknowledging school as an educational organisation is crucial already at the beginning of new teachers' practice. This learning could help them to better understand the school culture, make less mistakes and succeed more. This finding is in line with Gavish and Friedman (2007) who stipulate that teachers as organisation members should first and foremost be familiar with the organisational knowledge. Moreover, they are expected to lead and manage at school (Samuel, 1996; Senge, 1997). Belonging to the school culture is highly necessary for new teachers. This sense of belonging is both social and professional, providing physical and emotional safety, acceptance and a basis for measuring success (Fisherman, 2005).

New teachers should be a role model in their behaviour and conduct at school. Pupils and parents appreciate teachers whose pattern of behaviour is in line with the goals and values which they assert and on the basis of which they want to educate the pupils (Amit, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). New teachers' ambition should match the quotation of William Arthur Ward: 'The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires'.

Absorbing and nurturing new teachers is a significant layer in the school organisational culture. All those engaged in the absorption of new teachers aspire to prevent the difficulties, failures and dropout. Attention to the unique voice of the new teachers could enhance their absorption during their induction into the teaching profession.

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