

## **How to Help Novice Teachers in Intermediate Schools in Kuwait to Gain Confidence**

### **Introduction**

Teaching is like any other profession, employees need to have confidence to work effectively; for teachers, to have confidence is to believe that they have the ability to teach and succeed in the profession. Confidence is an important element of teachers' life, as they are in a position which requires them to interact with students and help them. Having confidence is important for all teachers, and particularly for novice teachers, as they are new to the profession. Gaining confidence at the start of their career may increase the chance that novice teachers will go on to have a long career in education, it will also help them to develop their teaching abilities and feel better prepared to succeed in the profession. In addition, "being a new teacher that has the basic needs of feeling accepted, secure and confident in what they are doing and affiliation with the faculty" (Joiner & Edwards, 2008: p. 47).

English language teachers in Kuwait, especially novice teachers, are like other teachers, they need to gain confidence when they enter the field of education; according to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy (cited in Joiner & Edwards, 2008: p. 44), the basic needs of new teachers are security and self-esteem. Novice teachers in the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Kuwait are evaluated once they have started teaching. This evaluation does not differentiate between novice teachers and experienced teachers, and this is why some novice teachers find the evaluation, which may be used to determine teachers' progress on the career ladder, unfair. It is simultaneously, both an evaluation and a type of supervision. My personal experience as an English language teacher in the MOE in Kuwait showed me that novice teachers tend to concentrate more on the word 'evaluation' and this evokes feelings of anxiety, which may hinder them from gaining confidence in their early years in teaching, as they are supposed to learn from experience. In this paper I examine how novice teachers in intermediate schools in Kuwait can be helped to gain confidence. Firstly, I give a general overview of the education and evaluation system in Kuwait. I then

discuss the problems that novice teachers may face. Finally, I focus on how to help them gain confidence during the early years of their teaching career.

### **Education and evaluation system in Kuwait**

According to Lawson (1992), the period from being a student to become a teacher is transitional, and students may have difficulty in the beginning; this was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the College of Education in Kuwait University. The College has been working with the MOE to train teachers and provide professional opportunities for all teachers; its objective is to generate a competent work force in the field of education, it also organises national and international conferences on the development of education. There are three levels in the College; undergraduate, postgraduate diploma, and graduate studies. The undergraduate programmes offer four-year courses on kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and secondary school teaching in different areas and subjects. Students choose their main subject after their first year. This helps the College to provide the MOE with the expected numbers of graduate teachers in each subject and level. In other words, it is like applying for a job and instead of waiting, the students will be doing the remaining three years of their course. This cooperation between the MOE and the College of Education is an advantage for the students, as it allows them to start their career immediately, for example, students normally graduate in June and start working as teachers in the MOE in September, only three months later.

In order to graduate from the College, fourth year students must complete a 13-week practical module (first or second course). The College will help students to achieve this; it sends them to particular schools. This requirement is intended to ensure that students experience teaching in real-life situation, away from the college and books, and have a clear idea about what they are expecting to do after graduation in schools as teachers. Students who do this compulsory module in one of the state schools are supervised and then evaluated at the end of course by their head of department, the inspector (supervisor), and the principal, but the evaluation criteria are slightly different from those used for the evaluation of professional teachers (full time). The objective is supervision rather than evaluation, giving students a general idea of the reality of classroom life, and this is probably why most students pass this module and

graduate without facing any serious problems. After graduation students become novice teachers, and they face a considerable number of difficulties that they did not encounter in the practical course they took in their fourth year.

Every teacher in a state school in Kuwait will be visited by the school's principal, their head of department, and the inspector of schools. Over 3 or 4 visits in the course of the academic year each of these professionals will evaluate the teacher's performance and produce a written report; at the end of the year they will meet to discuss the teacher's performance. Following discussion they will score the teacher's performance as a percentage and this will be recorded in the teacher's portfolio, to be used in making career-related decisions for all teachers (novices and experienced teachers). The MOE aim is to have effective teachers working effectively with every student everyday and "without high quality evaluation systems, we cannot know if we have high quality teachers" (Stronge & Tucker, 2003: p. 3). This evaluation system is designed to encourage both the teacher and the school to improve. It is important to improve the performance of the teacher in order to promote his or her professional development.

Confidence may become an issue for novice teachers if they start paying more attention to the evaluation than improving and developing their teaching skills, as they need to learn from experience. This may be a normal reaction, as the evaluation will be recorded in their portfolio and affect their future career in the profession. This leads to teachers feeling that they are being evaluated all time and puts them under pressure and increases the stress they feel, which may prevent novice teachers gaining confidence. Even if the evaluation system is being used over the long term it is only fair that novice teachers' performance should be assessed in a different way from that of experienced teachers, who have been working for years in the profession and are therefore able to focus more on learning from their experience, which in turn builds their confidence.

According to Schaffer *et al.* (1992) one of the problems that new teachers may face is reality shock; this may affect some novice teachers in Kuwait, who feel that they are being evaluated from the first day. This transitional period may be the most difficult period in a teacher's life, and novice teachers need help from people around them,

especially in school, to gain confidence and establish a career. In this transitional period, novice teachers need to feel confident when they are teaching, otherwise they may feel continually stressed and under pressure because of the evaluation process which is already under way. This may hinder the development of their teaching skills in terms of the four stages in becoming an expert teacher described by Brillinger (2004): novice, experienced, competent and expert, and this development process may indicate, in a way, to the importance of teachers' knowledge in the classroom. Teachers' knowledge about classroom teaching is not a formal body of knowledge that can be taught; it is acquired through personal experience in the classroom. Time and experience promote the development of novice teachers (Zarei & Sharifabad, 2012).

### **Confidence and self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers**

"Teachers' beliefs about their own teaching can be concerned with teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, which are developed by some powerful influences like experience of teachers during teaching." (Zarei & Sharifabad, 2012), lack of confidence may affect teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, and whether they choose to continue in the field of education. It is important that novice teachers believe in their own abilities and capabilities, so they can have a long career; they may face difficulties in achieving this if they lack confidence.

According to Tschannen-Moran a teacher's efficacy belief is "a judgment of his/her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (2001: p. 783).

Many authors have argued that teachers' self-esteem and positive self-efficacy beliefs may affect students' achievements. There is a positive association between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in their capabilities and self-confidence and their students' academic achievements and motivation (Graham et al., 2001), as self-efficacy beliefs can influence individuals' achievement levels (Pajares, 2002). These levels can increase over time as novice teachers gain experience (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), and may be improved by the pre-qualification period they spend in training (Ekici, 2008; cited in Ozder, 2011). According to Ozerkan (2007; cited in Ozder, 2011) when teachers are satisfied with their performance, their self-efficacy belief

will increase: "novice teachers who have a high sense of teacher efficacy find greater satisfaction in teaching, have a more positive reaction to teaching, and experience less stress" (Zarei & Sharifabad, 2012). However, Woolfolk and Spero (2005) argued that is not necessarily the case that efficacy factors will increase with teaching experience; some may even decline. Bandura's (1977) theory defined teacher efficacy as a type of self-efficacy, which led many researchers to investigate the two areas in depth (Evres *et al.* 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). According to Bandura's theory, the early years of novice teachers' professional life may be critical to their long-term development as teachers, because efficacy may be easily influenced in these early years.

Previous studies have focused on the relationship between intrinsic factors and teachers' efficacy (Canrinus & Fokkens Bruinsma, 2011; Chinn, 2007). However a more recent study (2012) conducted by Zarei and Sharifabad in Iran examined the differences between experienced and novice teachers' perceptions of the effect of intrinsic factors on teacher efficacy. The 99 participants were Iranian teachers (males and females) teaching English in Iran. They were divided into two groups, the first group comprised 53 experienced teachers (more than 10 years in the teaching field) and the second group was made up of 46 novice teachers (less than 3 years in teaching). The instruments used in this study were a general proficiency test and an intrinsic factors questionnaire. One important conclusion of the study was that self-perceptions of anxiety and autonomy were different for experienced and novice teachers; the results supported the claim of many novice teachers in Kuwait, who say that it is only fair that their performance should be assessed and evaluated differently from that of experienced teachers, who have been working in the profession for years.

Some novice teachers may struggle with the difficulties that lack of confidence can cause. Feeling insecure about their preparedness for evaluation will put them under pressure, and this may lead them to start imitating their experienced colleagues 'to be on the safe side' and to get a good grade in the evaluation. This may lead to another problem: when observing experienced or expert teachers novice teachers need to understand why particular instructional techniques were used; imitating blindly will not help them to develop their own teaching style and they may end up using these

instructional techniques inappropriately. Another issue that novice teachers in intermediate schools in Kuwait may face is isolation, as they are newcomers to teaching. When they enter this new environment, different types of support (instructional and emotional) are needed to help them to gain confidence in their professional ability. As part of MOE plans to help novice teachers, the Ministry organises a variety of practices alongside the evaluation (or supervision) system including orientation and introductory training sessions, but these are mostly on a superficial level. The Ministry also organises workshops, which are in most cases perfect, unlike real classrooms, because the used scenario in a certain workshop is almost impossible to be applicable for all other classrooms in the country. These activities may help novice teachers in the early years. However, there are some other development tools for teachers which have yet to be used in Kuwait, and in this paper I examine the potential teacher development tools which might realistically be used to help novice teachers in intermediate schools in Kuwait gain confidence.

### **Using teacher development tools in the MOE**

My personal experience of spending two years as a novice teacher in an intermediate school in Kuwait showed that peer observation and teaching support groups are being used as development tools to help new teachers to gain confidence. Peer observation is the practice of observing and being observed by an experienced teacher in which the two parties later share knowledge and successful practices; it is not an evaluation tool, which is important for novice teachers' confidence, and also help them to be prepared for evaluation later. In addition to peer observation the MOE encourages heads of department to hold weekly teacher support groups as part of professional development. This is an excellent way for novice teachers to gain experience; they can attend and learn about the different teaching techniques and how to deal with pressures of the profession, they can share problems that they experience in the classroom and as a group find more than one solution. This is considered to be beneficial as every teacher can select the solution which would work best in his or her classroom. Peer observation and teacher support groups are effective tools for novice teachers' development, but we still need to consider alternative or additional development tools such as mentoring to help novice teachers to gain confidence and

therefore be more effective. "Teachers need a support system that will not only enable their success, but that will also foster a sense of community among all members of the building faculty" (Roff, 2012: p. 31).

## **Mentoring**

Every intermediate school English department in Kuwait has a head of department who is senior to the other teachers in the department. Part of the head of department's job is helping novice teachers in their first year and this should take the form of coaching rather than mentoring, as mentoring would be difficult for the head of department for a variety of reasons including teaching his or her own classes, evaluating all the teachers in the department and attending weekly meetings with the department's teachers, supervisors and the principal. Coaching is more short-term than mentoring and focuses only on teachers' professional skills, whereas mentoring focuses on both professional and personal support (Fletcher, 2012).

Mentoring is considered to be an important part of induction programmes; it involves an experienced teacher (mentor) assisting a novice teacher (mentee) to adapt to the profession. Mentors usually begin by helping novice teachers with classroom management and curriculum planning, but they also offer general support and encouragement (Shakrani, 2008; Huling & Resta, 2007). One of the aims of mentoring is to help new teachers to gain confidence in their early years in the profession so that they will stay in the field, as this period is transitional and a critical one for them. Shakrani (2008) defines mentoring as a one-to-one process in which the mentor offers guidance and support to the mentee. Mentors are often described as advisers, because they have enough experience to advise new teachers in the field, but the mentoring relationship is not only about advising, it is about offering professional and personal or emotional support. The relationship between mentor and mentee may determine the degree of support that novice teachers receive. For example, the support most valued by first year teachers was emotional support, followed by advice on instructional strategies (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). The mentoring relationship is a two-way relationship, so both the mentor and the mentee should benefit from the relationship. For example, mentors can share their experience and knowledge of the teaching field, by answering mentees' questions, conversely recently graduated

teachers can discuss the latest teaching techniques, strategies and ideas, such as using technology in teaching, with their mentor. However, the mentee should be willing to listen to critical feedback, and stay open to learn new ways of thinking since "Novice teachers can learn how to become effective teachers through meaningful interactions with their mentors" (Parker, 2012: p. 120).

Mentoring represents an opportunity for both parties to the relationship to learn from each other; the mentee will benefit on a professional and personal level, whilst the mentor will also benefit from teaching the mentee and will learn at the same time. One of the benefits of having a mentor is increased self-esteem and confidence when dealing with the profession. The objective of a good matching or pairing between an experienced teacher and a new teacher is to help the novice teachers to become more effective, by offering him or her the opportunity to learn from colleagues and share knowledge. Heider (2005) recommended that members of the pair should be at the same level to maximise effectiveness. "Matching mentors and novices by grade level, content, or building may provide them with the necessary support" (Parker, 2012: p. 120), and mentoring is a programme which offers this kind of support to novice teachers in various areas of professional competence including motivating students, evaluating students' work, avoiding insufficient preparation time and dealing with heavy teaching loads.

Confidentiality can play an important role in helping novice teachers to gain confidence, especially if they are struggling at the start of their careers; in order to discuss personal issues and issues that are affecting their progress they need to trust their mentor. Mentors should respect mentees' confidentiality, even after the programme has ended. Mutual respect of the mentor and the mentee is an important factor in building novice teachers' confidence, it is especially advantageous for the mentor to listen to the mentee's views.

Establishing mentoring programmes in the MOE is no longer impossible, because mentoring programmes are not universal (Parker, 2010), and can be adjusted to the available resources. MOE could assign a mentor to each new teacher soon after they started working in the Ministry. The MOE could begin setting up programmes to allow experienced teachers (mentors) and novice teachers to meet face-to-face

throughout a novice's first year; the frequency of meetings could be adjusted according to the number of mentors available. Meetings between mentors and mentees could be used to address some of the problems currently affecting the teaching and education system and "for reflection on teaching practices, both inside and outside the classroom (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Such reflection may involve observing lessons taught by teachers with varying levels of experience, then meeting to share strategies and discuss solutions to problems" (Parker, 2010: p.113).

Roff's (2012) study focused on how teachers perceived the impact of mentoring programmes on the support and collaboration of first year teachers. The 16 participants were first year teachers, mentors and administrators in two public schools in New York. The limitation of this study is the number of participants, because this was limited by the number of teachers who had just completed their first year in teaching, and the number of mentors mentoring first year teachers. The instruments used in this study were interviews with first year teachers, mentors and administrators. Responses were analysed for similarities and each participant was given his or her transcript to review for accuracy. An interesting finding was that "Many first-year teachers, after being mentored, feel a sense of support from and a relationship with their mentors. Such connections allow a mentee to succeed in the world of teaching knowing that he or she is not alone" (Roff, 2012: p. 37). Mentoring could help novice teachers overcome the feeling of being isolated, which affects their confidence. Mentoring could be used alongside the evaluation system in the MOE in Kuwait to help novice teachers gain confidence: "Evaluation of more structured mentoring programs reports positive teacher retention" (Roff, 2012: p. 33).

## **Conclusion**

It is important for novice teachers to gain confidence, as they are experiencing teaching for the first time and gaining confidence in the early years of their career will help them to have a long career in the field of teaching. In this transitional period the only way to learn is by experience, but novice teachers also need help from people around them. Separating evaluation from supervision might help novice teachers to gain confidence, as they would feel more relaxed and learn from their experiences. Induction programmes and development tools, which may include mentoring

Hashem Adnan  
December 2012  
hashem.j@hotmail.com  
<https://hashemadnan.wordpress.com/>

programmes, play an important role in guiding and supporting novice teachers in their early years; mentoring programmes can be used as a type of supervision.

Mentoring is a helpful tool which allows the mentor and novice teacher to focus on the daily problems that teachers may face in the profession. "Mentoring programs... are intended to help novice teachers to handle the challenges of the classroom and school environment" (Roff, 2012: p. 31), and mentoring can provide novice teachers with a supportive working environment, which allows them to realise that teaching is a learning process and acquiring competence takes time.

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Hashem Adnan  
December 2012  
hashem.j@hotmail.com  
<https://hashemadnan.wordpress.com/>

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Hashem Adnan  
December 2012  
hashem.j@hotmail.com  
<https://hashemadnan.wordpress.com/>

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