

ERD 2016: Education, Reflection, Development, Fourth Edition

Training for Small Group Instruction in Pre-Service Teacher Education: Pedagogical Instructors' Perceptions

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Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.12.80>

According to the New Horizon educational reform, all teachers in Israel must implement small group instruction within the school curriculum. Small group instruction is perceived as an opportunity to provide a supportive learning environment that can enable schools to reach their educational aims in individualized ways. Having examined the implementation of small group instruction by novice teachers, our objective is to present the results of a research which aimed to clarify how pedagogical instructors perceive training for small group instruction, and how small group instruction is embedded in their curricula. Data were collected from 16 pedagogical advisors pertaining to EFL, Physical Education, special Education, and Sciences. The findings emerging from this research shows a duality in the pedagogical instructors' perceptions of the importance assigned to teaching for small group instruction hours. On the one hand, small group instruction hours are perceived as important enough to constitute part of teacher training, but on the other hand, they are considered as a subject that it is preferable for students to learn to implement during their practice teaching. Therefore, this research places training for implementing small group instruction on the educational and public agenda as a dual issue, presenting a gap between perceptions of its importance and its absence from the training program in the teacher education process.

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Keywords: Small group instruction; educational reform; pedagogical instructors; teacher education.

1. Introduction

At the center of the 'New Horizon' Educational reform stands the promotion of teaching-learning and developing social-moral and emotional aspects through small group instruction. The 'New Horizon' reform recognizes the need for a variety of frameworks in which to organize learners (classroom, small group instruction teaching - teacher-pupils and small groups with teachers) to reach educational and teaching goals. Furthermore, the reform recognizes the complexity of the teaching profession and the need for ongoing professional development therein. Moreover, according to the reform, teachers' jobs at school will be made up of classroom teaching hours, small group instruction and non-teaching hours. Every teacher is obligated to implement small group instruction to teach pupils either individually or in groups of 2-5 pupils (Ministry of Education, 2010). As such, small group instruction is part of every teacher's job in Israeli schools.

According to Ministry of Education guidelines, small group instruction is used first and foremost for reinforcement, deepening and enriching teaching subjects, but also to nurture pupils' social and emotional aspects. In addition - and this is perhaps the crowning glory of small group instruction - time is also devoted within their framework for personal conversations between a homeroom teacher and every pupil, called 'heart to heart conversations'. As mentioned, small group instruction is devoted to advancing pupils' achievements, learning, social performance and wellbeing.

From an organizational perspective, every school receives a basket of small group instruction hours made up of the total number of hours allocated to each staff member. It is up to the school to allocate these hours according to its needs, based on mapping pupils' needs dictated by learning, social and emotional measures. Every three to five months (depending on the professional judgment of individual schools), there is turnover between pupils who have had regular encounters and others, who are awaiting their turn. As such, teachers have the responsibility to prepare work plans for small group instruction hours and present them to school principals for approval. Previous research carried out about the implementation of small group instruction hours focused on their implementation by teachers in their first year of teaching (Od-Cohen & Hadari, 2015) and pointed out the need for organized and institutional training for small group instruction in order to enable a smooth entry into teaching.

In light of the aforesaid, the question arises whether teacher training colleges and first and foremost pedagogical instructors entrusted with didactic content and practice teaching should prepare student teachers to teach small group instruction as part of teacher education curricula.

2. Problem Statement

The introduction of the 'New Horizon' and 'Oz LeTemura' reforms into elementary and high schools respectively created a new learning framework: small group instruction hours in which teachers are placed with small groups for an entire lesson. Studies argue that instructing pupils in small groups is a challenging task that affects pupils' cognitive, social and emotional aspects (Cazden, 2001). The literature regarding teaching in small groups presents this teaching approach as an opportunity for teaching focused on individuals, that enable nurturing their cognitive abilities by emphasizing the

learners' diversity and adapting teaching for each individual's needs (Gardner, 1996). Teaching in small groups creates an opportunity for new discourse in current pedagogy (Reichert, 2009). Consequently, the teacher's role is to be a kind of mentor and facilitator that enables cooperative learning, to provide an appropriate teaching environment (Lazarowitz, 2007), and to propose learning tasks adjusted to children's learning styles (Reichert, 2009). That is to say, individual pupils are the focus and schools organize themselves around them (Bishop, 1971). The Branco Weiss Institution defines small group instruction teaching as based on an approach of small group instruction and focused educational processes. Each learner receives small group instruction guidance according to his/her needs, with attention paid to his/her abilities and personal style. The small group instruction approach sees practice and execution adjusted to each learner as the center of the learning process. The small group instruction way of thinking as a teaching method whose purpose is inviting successful experiences for learners was developed in Israel at the Branco Weiss Institution (Galili, 2013). Emerging from literature is the understanding that teachers' effectiveness and professional growth are found in their initial training, that is to say teacher education colleges, as well as their ongoing professional development in in-service frameworks (Avdor & Kfir, 2013).

Teacher education colleges in Israel today provide general knowledge, pedagogical-formal knowledge and unique professional behaviors (Lamm, 1988, 2000), with pedagogical instructors, serving as a type of teaching 'guides', responsible for pedagogical knowledge. The role of pedagogical instructors in the context of practical teaching days is, in fact, to be mediators between college and the field. They are the ones who find schools suitable for practice teaching, contact training teachers and take care of the technical and organizational aspects of these days. In new practical teaching models, pedagogical instructors are members of school staffs who collaborate in planning practice teaching processes in accordance with their schools' curricula.

Pedagogical instructors fulfill an important role in structuring student teachers' knowledge. They accompany their groups of students in personal and group guidance. They are required to help students develop through a long journey entailing wonderment, questions and dilemmas along the way, to make the transition from a learning student status to that of novice teacher, capable of taking responsibility for a learning class and integrating into school culture and everything this entails (Zilberstein, 2005).

Studies have found that practice teaching constitutes a most significant part of teacher education. Students greatly appreciate pedagogical and didactic escorting as well as pedagogical and didactic teachers (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2004). Reichenberg & Wertheim (2002) pointed out two knowledge components that were found to be most important among pedagogical instructors: knowledge of pedagogical instruction and knowledge of teaching skills. Pedagogical instruction, according to Rodgers (2002), leads to reflective activity. This activity provides teachers with new insights about pupils' learning abilities and enables them to discern gaps that result between what they have taught and what children have actually absorbed.

Recently, a new practice teaching model has been introduced to teacher education in Israel and that is the Academia-Classroom program (2014). The program, whose basis is the goal of reinforcing the partnership between academia, schools and districts, is meant to provide a response to three central challenges: promoting significant learning in classrooms by integrating two adults to work

simultaneously in classrooms; improving student teachers' training and professional development of experienced teachers; developing the career ladder starting from student, through interns and specialized training teachers and pedagogical instructors on behalf of academic institutions.

The central aim is establishing partnership between academic teacher education institutions and the school system in Israel in order to improve the quality of teacher training processes, teacher induction processes, teaching and professional development and to promote significant learning in educational institutions.

Academic teacher education institutions are partners with the Ministry of Education in leading a common educational vision and implementing it within the education system. Academic teacher education institutions serve as leaders of change and provide a response to the needs of the education system on the issue of training. Teacher training is relevant and linked to the field and emphasizes intensive practical work and deepening the link between practice and theory. Pedagogical instructors are empowered as influencers on schools and educational institutions and leaders in educational processes within a district, community and educational institutions. School Principals and experienced teachers continue to develop in academic teacher education institutions working towards advanced degrees in teaching and education areas. Academic teacher education institutions are making the transition from training based mainly on academic aspects to training based on field experience in teaching similar to clinical training that exists in medical schools (÷

Pedagogical instructors are responsible for planning and structuring practice teaching in educational institutions and are partners in them. They accompany groups of students who are placed together in a school. Their involvement in school is broad. They closely accompany school processes and are in contact with school principals and other stakeholders in order to create systematic experience for students at educational institutions both in teaching roles and as part of a team and members of an educational community. Pedagogical instructors are involved in developing staff of schools in which practice teaching is carried out, together with students, according to needs determined in cooperation with school management. They are partners in the training of teachers who train students and are specializing in the roles of teacher tutors/colleagues (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The introduction of reforms has become a fact of life today for teachers (Priestly, 2011) and mostly as top down steps taken without involving them in the process. The expectation is that they will change patterns of behavior and even values and basic assumptions as part of the process (Fullan, 2006, 2011). Teachers are required to adapt to ongoing social changes, developments in knowledge and growing accessibility to knowledge while understanding their future roles. Like teachers, pedagogical instructors are also required to prepare student teachers for changes and reforms in education. Teachers do not feel like partners in top down change processes or agents of changes, feelings that are the basis for successful educational reforms (Avidov- Unger et al., 2013).

When teachers and pedagogical instructors are perceived by policy makers solely as reform implementers, implementation is expected to be superficial and characterized by an absence of a sense of ownership, passivity, reduced autonomy and limited motivation for improvement (Luttenberg et al., 2013). Not much research was found focusing on pedagogical instructors perceptions pertaining to

training for small group instruction within the New Horizon educational reform, hence the significance of this study.

3. Purpose of the study

To examine existing perceptions among pedagogical instructors at colleges of education with regard to training towards implementation of small group instruction.

The study asked the question: What perceptions exist among pedagogical instructors with regard to training for implementing small group instruction in schools?

4. Research Methods

In order to understand implementation of small group instruction hours by pedagogical instructors in teacher education colleges, we chose qualitative research according to the interpretive-constructivist approach (Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2001). In order to carry out this research, we chose the qualitative approach. As researchers operating on the basis of the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, we sought to reach an understanding of the researched reality on the basis of interpretive contact with research partners, 16 pedagogical instructors employed by teacher education colleges and responsible for didactic lessons and practice teaching. Tzabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) defined qualitative research as research with participants and not on participants, and as a research approach suitable for examining peoples' perceptions, views and actions, and enabling reaching a profound understanding of phenomena. According to Richardson (1996), this research approach is particularly relevant in situations in which complex issues are researched, whose examination in experimental studies that summarize their findings in a quantitative-statistical manner, does not exhaust the studied phenomenon, and therefore cannot present a comprehensive picture of its underlying interpretations. Indeed, quantitative measurement will not allow for in-depth study of a phenomenon. Moreover, according to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a crucial process in understanding human society. By using this research approach, researchers can build a complete and clear picture of information gathered in the natural environment, through interviews, reports, observations, and more (Shkedi, 2011). As such, we found this approach to be the most appropriate for our study.

Since the aim of this study was to collect information about pedagogical instructors' perceptions regarding training for small group instruction hours in teacher education colleges, participants in this research were 16 pedagogical instructors from one teacher education college in Northern Israel. Research participants came from a variety of areas such as English, physical education, sciences, Judaism, special education and early childhood. We believe that this population represents all areas of teaching at the college. All participants gave their informed consent to participating in the research. In addition, to maintain anonymity all identifying details have been removed in order to protect the privacy of participants.

Since the qualitative research approach focuses on understanding the essence and meaning of phenomena, such as the phenomenon of implementation of small group instruction hours in teacher

education by pedagogical instructors through their perceptions as those who are involved in this process, when we come to examine the complex reality of life in which people from different worlds are involved, the appropriate research tool to collect information from these people is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews allow for providing insights, thoughts and opportunities to describe actions directly related to the studied issue. The interviews took place in the framework of conversations and included questions relating to central predetermined issues that were congruent with the research question. Nonetheless, interviews allowed for flexibility with regard to the order in which questions appeared and openness to additional subjects (Creswell, 2012). Data collection was carried out throughout the academic year 2015-2016. In addition, 16 syllabi related to courses in didactics and practice teaching were reviewed. Course review as document analysis (Creswell, 2012) was carried out in order to discover to what extent small group instruction appeared as a topic in these syllabi.

Data garnered from the semi-structures interviews was analyzed using 'content analysis', which is meant to infer inductively from 'units of text', i.e. transcribed interviews, the pedagogical instructors' perceptions. Units of analysis were words, expressions or sentences that were aligned to the research aim, research question and studied issues. The analysis process commenced at the initial mapping stage, during which interviewees' statements were compared in order to find similarities and differences, inductively. Similar ones were put together into the same category according to their content match (Shkedi, 2011). The theoretical framework determined at the initial stage of research also comprises the basis for presenting the research findings. The process of categorization was done as interpretation and conceptualization, that is to say, creating a system of concepts that should provide meaning to the data.

5. Findings

Content analysis referred to the research question: What perceptions exist among pedagogical instructors with regard to training for implementing small group instruction in schools?

Content analysis of the data collected in semi-structured interviews and analyzing the syllabi yielded nine categories that are detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1. Pedagogical instructors' existing perceptions regarding implementation of small group instruction hours in teacher education

Category	Quote
Importance of training teachers for small group instruction hours	Yes, they must be prepared for what exists in the 'New Horizons' reform
Characteristics of training teachers for teaching small group instruction hours	Adapting teaching to the needs of learners, close follow-up of their progress and abilities to give immediate response
Sources of knowledge for pedagogical instructors	I experienced it myself as a school teacher
Advice	Colleagues in subject matter and those responsible for the course
Content of training for small group instruction hours	Principles of working in small groups, identifying needs and planning teaching accordingly
6. Amount of training	12 syllabi dealing directly with teacher education were reviewed, no mention of this as a subject was found in any of them. Very restricted as I don't have the time to deal with it According to priorities

7. Implementation	Fragmented issue - there are very general guidelines but at the end of the day every school and every teacher uses this resource differently
8. Student awareness	They are aware because they are exposed to it at school and are also required to teach
9. Difficulties	Sometimes perceived as spontaneous that doesn't need preparation.

1.1 Importance of teacher training for small group instruction hours

Content analysis shows that all participants in this study, with one exception, believed that it is important to train teachers for teaching small group instruction hours. Content analysis showed two main reasons for the importance of small group instruction hours – 'essence of small group instruction hours as special teaching' and 'system's demand as part of the 'New Horizon' reform'.

Testimony to perception of small group instruction hours as a special type of teaching can be seen in participants' statements: *"Teaching in small groups is essentially different from teaching large groups"*, *"Small group instruction hours invite activating teaching focused on individuals"*, *"Of course, it is outside the physical education syllabus. We have to formulate a program for small group learning in physical education for hyperactive children, obese children, children with chronic illnesses, they need to get more emotionally, there is not enough of this in physical education"*. *"You see, the small group instruction is very important"*, *"Encounters with individual students requires discernment and appropriate reference"*, *"Small group instruction hours enable activating teaching focused on an individual"*.

Another perception of the importance attributed to training to teach small group instruction hours refers to the education system's demands as part of the 'New Horizon' reform. Testimony to this perception can be seen in participants' statements: *"It is part of the system because of 'New Horizons'"*, small group instruction hours *"are part of educational reform and teachers are committed to them as part of the teaching framework at school"*, *"They need to be prepared for what exists in the system"*, *"Every Physical Education teacher has to teach small group instruction hours"*, *"School curricula allow and demand small group instruction hours"*, *"It's a basket of tools that allow them to integrate into the system"*.

These decisive statements with regard to the consensus that exists among pedagogical instructors contradict the complete absence of training for small group instruction hours in the examined syllabi. The examination showed that despite the fact that pedagogical instructors assign great importance to training for small group instruction hours, implementation in the field shows a totally opposite picture. An explanation for this gap can be found in the words of one of the participants who pointed out that he expects *"that teachers who believe in them will do it during practice teaching days, but it is problematic because every school makes different use of small group instruction hours in Physical Education"*. Another opinion was expressed by another participant, who said *"There is no need for these hours - they'll learn at school during their work"*.

That is to say, small group instruction hours are perceived as important as part of teacher education, but are considered a subject that it is preferable that students learn to carry out during their practice teaching.

1.2 Characteristics of training teachers for teaching small group instruction hours

Content analysis yielded a number of perceptions relating to the characteristics of training for small group instruction hours. In general, they relate to *"adjusting teaching to the needs of learners, close follow-up of progress and abilities in order to provide immediate response, reinforce relationships with teacher (and with a group of learners) and personal relationship, intimate and safe environment which allows children to experience, make mistakes and with correct planning, mainly to succeed"*. That is to say, with regards to characteristics of training for small group instruction hours, pedagogical instructors revealed, in fact, their perceptions with reference to the essence of small group instruction hours as a characteristic of teaching in small groups.

These perceptions refer to small group instruction as an opportunity to provide a response to pupils with special needs: *"reinforce a single child, broaden his/her horizons, reinforce content, respond to special emotional and cognitive needs"*. *"Needy children from a motor or socio-emotional aspect"*, *"Enrich outstanding or pupils finding it difficult"*, *"the strongest characteristic is to reach children for whom it is difficult in regular classes. To be an adult mentor, to see a child that is not always seen"*. That is to say that of all a teacher's roles, teaching small group instruction is embodied in taking the role of adult mentors, the meaning of which is to pay complete attention to individual pupils and their special educational needs.

Small group instruction hours can constitute the driving force to grow and enjoy learning: *"These hours can empower and drive pupils to learning"*, but they demand special and sophisticated preparation for planning and activating learning strategies in order to maximize their benefit: *"Small group instruction must be structured and include syllabi that are congruent with the general syllabus. Learning strategies must have a different nature than those in the classroom."*

It appears from content analysis that another characteristic of small group instruction is teaching pupils with disabilities: *"Teachers are required to use teaching methods similar to those used with pupils with disabilities. The pace of activities and number of tasks will be different from regular teaching. In addition, the forms of teaching and pupils seating will be different"*.

In conclusion, it can be said that pedagogical instructors' perceptions show that characteristics of small group instruction embody great potential to nurture struggling pupils as well as those who need enrichment, to make special adjustments and plans and as a factor to motivate learning.

2. Sources of knowledge for pedagogical instructors

Content analysis of information collected through the interviews with pedagogical instructors revealed two main sources of knowledge about small group instruction. Most knowledge derives from their experience as school teachers and a little from reading materials received from the Ministry of Educations providing guidance for implementing small group instruction hours.

It appears from the content analysis that pedagogical instructors' primary source of knowledge about small group instruction is their experience in implementing small group instruction as former school teachers or from observations they have made while accompanying students to their practice teaching. Evidence of this perception can be seen in their statements such as, *"I experienced them myself as a school teacher"*, *"My knowledge relies on my being a teacher teaching at an elementary school and I*

was exposed to small group instruction among my colleagues with specific pupils I teach the whole class together". This knowledge serves pedagogical instructors in guiding students in their practice teaching: "Being an practicing teacher still active in the field helps me a lot in nurturing students and guiding them to exploit small group instruction hours effectively". "I am very familiar with them. I experienced them myself as a school teacher and teacher trainer, I constructed workshops for teachers on this subject". That is to say that pedagogical instructors use their practical knowledge as teachers to either develop teachers' workshops in the field on the basis of their experience as teachers, or as one testified: "My own learning as a pedagogical manager".

Another source of knowledge emerging from the content analysis was special training given to active teachers by the Ministry of Education. Evidence of this can be found in participants' statements saying that "I rely on materials received from the Ministry of Education, materials we received from Avney Rosha (a professional development framework for school principals). I am very familiar with the implementation of small group instruction and promote the process in the school where I work. When I was trained as a teacher, there were no small group instruction hours and therefore I was not trained as such. I am familiar with them from the field, what is required in order to make teaching effective and professional". Small group instruction hours are also discussed in pedagogical instructors' meetings at the College: "Within our pedagogical instructor meetings at the college, we dealt with the issue and received written materials to study". Self-learning about small group instruction hours is from reading, and as a consequence from collaborating with colleagues: "Information, self-learning, investigating and turning to sources of knowledge such as group doctrine, books, etc. I share everything I do with my colleagues as well". "Information from the Ministry of Education, from Science and Technology. They provide clear plans." "I refer to sources on the subject of differential teaching".

In conclusion, it can be said that pedagogical instructors' sources of knowledge are learning from their experience as school teachers and from personal initiatives to investigate the subject according to accessible sources of knowledge from the Ministry of Education. In the light of the reality in a college where not all pedagogical instructors have teaching experience with small group instruction hours or teaching at school in general, it is possible to say that pedagogical instructors' knowledge itself is quite limited on this subject.

3. Advice

As a result of pedagogical instructors' limited sources of knowledge on the subject of small group instruction hours, it was interesting to discover whether and who they themselves consult in order to consolidate knowledge that can be passed on to student teachers for whom they are responsible. Similar to sources of knowledge from personal experience, in this category too the evidence shows that pedagogical instructors seek advice on this subject primarily from work colleagues or other authority figures who have themselves experienced teaching small group instruction hours.

"My colleagues who have experienced small group instruction hours at school", "My training colleague. I read a little", "Colleagues in the subject matter, and the person in charge of the course...", "My colleague who is also an expert in preschoolers", "I don't know anyone at the college who is more knowledgeable than I am", "a training colleague", " teachers who practice in the field", "Colleagues.

All the pedagogical instructors. A good study group", "the special education staff", "I consult the school principal and management team. Besides them, I consult friends and other principals and ask them how things are done at their schools", "In addition, I discuss this in conversations I have with training teachers when I am at schools",

Some research participants stated that they did not consult on this issue at all: *"I don't consult, I don't consult, there is no one to consult with".*

In conclusion, it can be said that from pedagogical instructors' perceptions of consultation about small group instruction hours is carried out with colleagues who have practical experience in this area.

4. The content of training for small group instruction hours

Content analysis of the information garnered through the interviews with pedagogical instructors revealed that existing perceptions of training to teach small group instruction hours at school must be focused, in addition to contents, on the organizational aspect of small group instruction lessons. According to participants: *"One must focus on contents and organization of things".* Content analysis also shows that any reference to training to teach small group instruction hours is focused on organizational aspects of teaching: *"It is important to teach them to divide the lesson into small parts for differential work adjusted to each individual pupil". "It's important to teach them different teaching and learning strategies and structure small and varied teaching units. We have to work with them a lot on alternative assessment, different approaches to teaching." "From an organizational aspect, there is room to demand that students become more professional not just in frontal teaching but also in small groups. There is room to let them construct especially in core subjects teaching units for small group instruction hours according to the different syllabi."*

That is to say, pedagogical instructors' perceptions are, it appears, that training to teach small group instruction hours is how to organize them and which pedagogical approaches to use more than what to teach.

5. Amount of training

From an analysis of pedagogical instructors' syllabi, it emerges that the amount of training provided by pedagogical instructors to students for small group instruction hours is virtually nonexistent. From the 12 syllabi that deal directly with teacher training reviewed, not a single mention of this issue was found. Content analysis of interviews showed that pedagogical instructors either did not teach about small group instruction hours at all or only in a very limited manner. *"It's very limited because I don't have time to deal with it",* and another instructor added, *"Not enough, about 10% of total lessons"* and this despite their perception of the importance of training: *"Programs for learning in small groups must be formulated for Physical Education", "Yes, they must be trained for something that exists".*

The insight emerging from document and content analysis is that there is a large gap between the participants' understanding and perception of the importance of teaching small group instruction hours, and the subjects' entry into their teaching programs. That is to say, the amount of training for small

group instruction hours remains minimal in the training system, something that leaves this subject unexhausted.

6. Student awareness

As part of the content analysis of the pedagogical instructors' perceptions of implementing training for small group instruction hours, the subject of student awareness of this issue was examined.

Of 16 pedagogical instructors interviewed, seven said that students were aware of the issue because of their experience at schools and not from their learning at the college. *"They are aware because they are exposed to this issue at school and also are required to teach"*.

Some have to teach small group instruction hours on their practice teaching days: *"Yes, because they are obliged as part of their experience to join small group instruction hours given by training teachers"* and thus their awareness of the issue.

Others are not aware of the issue, according to pedagogical instructors, for various reasons: *"It appears that teaching in small groups is not perceived as a difficult process"*. Another instructor stated that, *"According to what I have seen so far, they see no reason to discuss the matter"*.

In addition, according to the interviewees, some of the students show an interest in the issue only after it is raised by their pedagogical instructor: *"Students are not aware of it. They don't experience this matter. Generally after the subject is presented, they request additional materials"*. In contrast, in certain training areas such as special education and sciences, there is awareness of teaching in small groups as part of their regular teaching: *"With us the subject is regularly discussed. I also observe students carrying out small group instruction and give them feedback"* or as stated by the a pedagogical instructor in the sciences, *"We teach most of the skills for small group instruction hours, because they are needed in regular lessons as well. For example, laboratory work, group work"*.

It can be said that according to the interviewees, students' awareness of the issue of small group instruction does not come from college pedagogical instructors, but from within schools in which they do practice teaching, when they see their training teachers teaching in small groups, and sometimes they too are forced to teach these hours without having been trained at the college, with the exception of certain subjects such as sciences and special education, where teaching in small groups is part of their training itself.

7. Implementation

Despite interviewees' declarations, content analysis of interviews shows that there is difficulty in implementing teaching in small groups. In their perceptions and statements, great importance is placed on training students in this teaching strategy, but in practice there is no implementation of this perception. As one of the instructor said: *"It's difficult because of a lack of correspondence between what is taught (ideal) and what happens in the field (reality)"*. And another instructor admitted, *"They had no training, and it is difficult to implement"*. Some interviewees said that it was difficult to implement because students themselves were not interested and did not even raise the matter. *"They*

don't want to work in small groups. They don't seem themselves working in them". In contrast, there are other pedagogical instructors who proposed ways of implementing teaching small group instruction hours: *"To create a clear lesson structure. To introduce it into the lesson design patterns that require reference to goals and objectives, as ways of demonstration, etc."*

The insight emerging from this category is that there is no implementation of small group teaching in teacher training in contrast to pedagogical instructors' perceptions. Once again we see the gap between what is desired, i.e., perceptions of the importance of training for small group instruction hours, and the reality, where there is no, or only limited, training for small group instruction hours.

8. Difficulties

The content analysis of this category reveals that there are many difficulties preventing pedagogical instructors from training student to teach in small groups and implement small group instruction hours as required by the Ministry of Education, and from their perception of the importance of this issue. *"A broken subject - there are very general guidelines, but at the end of the day, every school and every teacher uses this resource differently".* In their opinion, students do not see the importance of learning to teach in small groups, *"Sometimes it is perceived as something spontaneous that doesn't require preparation".* Lack of knowledge in teaching content emerges here too: *"They need much greater knowledge of the subject". "Small group teaching is perceived as incidental"*, something which makes teaching more difficult. Even students themselves do not cooperate, *"Students don't understand what they have to do. Sometimes, they don't know pupils well enough with their individual learning styles."* That is to say that lack of psychological knowledge too makes teaching more difficult.

Setting priorities for teaching constitute another difficulty in implementing pedagogical instructors' perceptions of teaching for small group instruction hours: *"Because I don't have time to deal with it". "According to my priorities, many basic subjects come before this one"*.

Another difficulty comes from the field as well, *"At the end of the day every school and every teacher used this resource differently"*. That is to say, sometimes there is no compatibility between what was learned at the college and the actual implementation at school. Even the use of these hours for other goals was expressed as a difficulty: *"There are students who use small group instruction hours at their practice teaching school but not for its original aim, but for tasks such as substitution, selected preparation, helping to maintain facilities"*.

The insight emerging from this category is that many difficulties, from setting priorities for including this topic in the syllabi to students' perceptions of the subject's importance as well as its implementation in the field, prevent pedagogical instructors from realizing their perceptions and actively train for small group instruction hours.

9. Conclusions

The picture emerging from analysis of data collected from pedagogical instructors is duality in their perceptions of the importance of teaching for small group instruction hours. On the one hand, small

group instruction hours are perceived as important enough to constitute part of teacher training, but on the other hand, they are considered as a subject that it is preferable for students to learn to implement during their practice teaching.

This duality is reinforced in light of pedagogical instructors' perceptions showing that characteristics of small group instruction hours embody great potential to nurture both struggling pupils and those who require enrichment, to special adaptation and planning and as a factor to motivate learning. In other words, pedagogical instructors recognize the importance of training to teach small group instruction hours, but on the other hand prefer that students learn to implement them as part of their practice teaching. School reality shows that the context in which small group instruction hours are implemented is rather broad and means of implementation are many and varied. This versatility creates a muddle amongst pedagogical instructors who are also burdened with many roles and tasks connected to their work with students (Lamm, 1988, 2000). In addition to pedagogical instructors being guides for student teachers, according to their perception of pedagogical instruction in teacher training, pedagogical instructors are part of a school team who plan together the practice teaching process together with schools' syllabi (Zilberstein, 2005).

Pedagogical instructors fulfill an important role in building students' knowledge of teaching. They accompany their group of student teachers in personal and group training. They are required to help students develop and go through a long journey entailing many wonderments, questions and dilemmas along the way, to make the transition from status of learning student to that of novice-teacher, capable of taking responsibility for a learning class and integrate into school culture with all that this entails (Zilberstein, 2005). Therefore, in light of this multitude of roles, it is not surprising that pedagogical instructors have a list of priorities and within this framework, prefer to leave responsibility for the training for small group instruction hours to training teachers and students' self-learning.

Another factor that can explain this duality is the background from which pedagogical instructors themselves emerged. In any case, pedagogical instructors' sources of knowledge about small group instruction hours lie in their experience as former school teachers and personal initiative to investigate the subject according to information sources from the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, the relatively new '*New Horizon*' reform in the Israeli education system, and its top down (Fullan, 2006, 2011) implementation without making teachers or pedagogical instructors partners in the new initiative. Pedagogical instructors are required to train student teachers for changes and reforms in education, but they do not feel that they are designers-partners or change agents, feelings that form the basis for successful reforms in education (Avidov- Unger et al., 2013), and therefore it seems, their abstention from including small group instruction hours in teacher training.

Additionally, in the light of the reality in colleges that not all pedagogical instructors are experienced at teaching small group instruction hours or even teaching at school generally, it is possible to say that their own knowledge is limited in this subject, and therefore they do not feel qualified enough to train students to teach small group instruction hours in which they themselves do not have sufficient experience. The result is that the amount of training for small group instruction hours, according to pedagogical instructors and the document analysis, remains minimal within the overall process of training for small group instruction hours. Moreover, pedagogical instructors

understand that students prefer to learn the subject of small group instruction hours from their training teachers during their practice teaching, which leads the pedagogical instructors to believe that its training is perhaps redundant.

The pedagogical instructors' perceptions regarding consultation on small group instruction hours is that they consult colleagues with practical experience in the area. As part of their responsibility to fulfill their role as pedagogical instructors, they choose to focus more on organizational aspects and pedagogical approaches rather than on teaching content aspects. In addition, it appears that pedagogical instructors perceive their main task as training students to cope with whole heterogeneous classes. Consequently the issue of small group instruction is perceived as a subject with which does not need explicit training as anyone can cope with it, and therefore is secondary in its importance.

To summarize, this modest research places training for implementing small group instruction on the educational and public agenda as a dual issue presenting a gap between perceptions of its importance and its absence from the training program in the teacher education process. From previous research carried out on implementing small group instruction by novice teachers in the first year of teaching (Od-Cohen & Hadari, 2015) clearly shows the necessity of this training as a proper process of induction into teaching. In light of the current research findings, and in order to allow proper implementation of small group instruction, not just as part of implementing the 'New Horizon' educational reform but also to allow novice teachers to implement small group instruction hours as a critical teaching process to improve and reinforce learning at schools and raise achievements of the education system, we recommend training pedagogical instructors themselves in this critical area. Therefore, it is recommended to develop, within teacher training institutions, frameworks to professionally develop pedagogical instructors so that they will be able to pass knowledge and skills along to student teachers as part of the training process.

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