

# **Pre-service Teachers Reflections on Their Ability to Conduct Authentic Dialogue in Preschool after Training Program Participation**

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# Pre-service Teachers Reflections on Their Ability to Conduct Authentic Dialogue in Preschool after Training Program Participation

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

pre-service teacher training program, authentic dialogue, reflection analysis

Educators that undergo training in diverse pedagogical approaches enhance their instructional abilities, enabling them to form quality interactions with children and foster an overall positive classroom atmosphere. Training programs should carefully consider, acknowledge and respect teacher's prior beliefs regarding their role, while addressing any apprehensions they may have during their student teaching experience. Pre-service teachers are at a unique juncture in their professional development. Simultaneously, they are students with limited abilities but yet must meet high levels of performance as teachers. The authentic dialogue training program's main goal was to enable students to be autonomous thinkers and doers while engaging in open dialogues with preschoolers. Deci and Ryan state in 2002 that a learning environment that is autonomous and supportive rather than controlling, motivates teachers to integrate and implement new knowledge into their professional practices. The knowledge they required in the authentic dialogue training program was taught through practical interactive seminars, this boosted their sense of self-confidence and enhanced their ability to implement the techniques learned into their dialogues with preschoolers. The assumption was that this approach would empower the pre-service teachers to enable the child to lead the dialogue based on their personal interests. This may be achieved through active listening and shifting away from a teacher-led dialogue.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Ausbildung von pädagogischem Personal, lebenswirklicher Dialog, Reflektionsanalyse

Eine Ausbildung in unterschiedlichen didaktischen Ansätzen verhilft Pädagog:innen zu einer Verbesserung ihrer pädagogischen Fähigkeiten, was es ihnen ermöglicht, hochwertige Interaktionen mit Kindern zu etablieren und eine generell positive Lernumgebung zu schaffen. Während Lehrkräfte sich in Aus- und Fortbildung befinden, sollten die Programme sorgfältig die früheren Vorstellungen der Lehrkräfte über ihre Rolle berücksichtigen, anerkennen und respektieren, gleichzeitig aber auch etwaige Bedenken, die während des Vorbereitungsdienstes auftreten können, ansprechen. Die Ausbildung von Erzieher:innen befindet sich an einem entscheidenden Punkt in deren beruflichen Entwicklung. Obwohl sie noch Schüler:innen mit begrenzten Fähigkeiten sind, müssen sie gleichzeitig hohe Leistungen als Lehrer:innen erbringen. Das Hauptziel des Ausbildungsprogramms für lebenswirkliche Dialoge besteht darin, die Lernenden dazu zu befähigen, eigenständig zu denken und zu handeln, während sie sich an offenen Dialogen mit Vorschüler:innen beteiligen. Deci und Ryan (2002) stellen fest, dass ein autonomes und unterstützendes Lernumfeld, das nicht kontrollierend ist, Lehrkräfte dazu motiviert, neues Wissen in ihre berufliche Praxis zu integrieren und umzusetzen. Das Wissen, das die Lehrkräfte im Ausbildungsprogramm für lebenswirkliche Dialoge benötigten, wurde in praktischen interaktiven Seminaren vermittelt, was ihr Selbstvertrauen stärkte und ihre Fähigkeit verbesserte, die erlernten Techniken in ihren Gesprächen mit Vorschulkindern umzusetzen. Die Hypothese war, dass dieser Ansatz die angehenden Erzieher:innen in die Lage versetzen würde, das Kind zu befähigen, einen Dialog auf der Grundlage seiner persönlichen Interessen zu führen. Dies kann durch aktives Zuhören und die Abkehr von einem von der Lehrkraft geführten Dialog erreicht werden.

## 1. Introduction

Authentic Dialogue is defined by the creation of open spaces where personal experiences are shared and diverse perspectives are encouraged. Strickland and Marinak (2016) attain that this may be achieved through active engagement, attentive listening and responsiveness to each other's needs. Bakhtin's (1981) Theory of Dialogue discusses the need for multiple voices to be heard in order for children to honor other points of view while assessing their own.

In line with Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory (1980), children develop both thinking and linguistic abilities through interactions with others around them. When adults have a broad vocabulary and are knowledgeable in different fields, children will thrive and be able to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences in a better way (Howe, 2010). For this reason, early childhood training programs in Israel have created high acceptance standards for pre-service teachers, enabling potential candidates to understand



the influence they have on children's development and that hard work is needed to meet those standards (Dror, 2016).

Educators that seek to promote open, unrestricted classroom dialogue and embrace the opportunity to create child-centered pedagogy understand the immense gain it has on the child's thinking processes. They will be better equipped to personalize their interactions in order to meet the social and emotional needs of the students (Trepanier-Street et al., 2007). Teachers that inspire students to delve into subjects of personal interest empower them to direct their learning by integrating new knowledge into their existing understanding, facilitating profound and meaningful learning experiences (Almeida, 2011). This approach creates opportunities for authentic dialogue.

According to Watt and Richardson (2008), many individuals opt for the teaching profession in order to make a positive impact on children's lives, perhaps in ways they did not personally experience. Consequently, the impact of teacher training programs becomes significant, as the newly acquired knowledge is not only applied within the program but after completing their training, it may extend into the classrooms.

This dynamic plays a vital part in shaping teachers' perceptions of their roles and influencing their classroom practices (Mercer, 2019). However, when entering training programs, pre-service teachers carry memories of their own student experiences and preconceived ideas about a teacher's role (Casey, 2016). Many of them, still adhere to the belief that classrooms should be teacher-centered, meaning that teachers select the topics to be taught and transmit their knowledge to the students, who are then expected to learn (Przybylska, 2011). These pre-existing beliefs can have a notable impact on their capacity to direct open classroom dialogue, as it necessitates a shift in their conceptual framework regarding the role of a teacher (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001).

Reflective thinking is instrumental in supporting teacher development by identifying two important areas of personal and professional growth; concern and confidence. The opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective thinking with regard to classroom dialogue, may lead to modifications in their pedagogy, fostering an improved, child-centered approach to teaching. This is due to the fact that they become more confident in their abilities to manage open dialogue. Their concern for losing control diminishes as they build their confidence. Reflective thinking is of

considerable importance in the domain of teacher development, as it enables educators to critically evaluate their teaching pedagogies and introduce changes that positively impact student learning (Mathew et al., 2017).

In researching teacher training programs, participants' reflections attained through interview analysis, prove to be an effective qualitative tool for data collection (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). It facilitates a cognitive examination of personal experiences, thoughts and actions, empowering individuals to derive insights from them and improve future practices.

Through introspection of their practices, educators can recognize specific skills that need enhancement, in order for them to be aligned with their objectives (Shoffner, 2008). As highlighted by Kizel (2014), reflective thinking cultivates heightened self-awareness among teachers, leading them to analyze their perceptions, beliefs, biases, and assumptions. This increased self-awareness contributes to a better understanding of one's teaching style and its impact on student learning. Moreover, reflective thinking fosters a willingness among educators to explore new approaches and techniques in the classroom. It also catalyzes collaborative endeavors with fellow teachers, encouraging the exchange of ideas and teaching strategies to build a community of learners (Fox et al., 2011).

## 2. Theoretical foundation

Training programs at teachers' colleges are faced at times with resistance from pre-service teachers regarding certain topics being taught. They often think they have enough intuitive knowledge and therefore are less open to innovative research in the field they are studying. This is true with regard to dialogue, which seems to be somewhat natural and not something that needs to be learned. However, research has shown that pre-service teachers imitate classroom management as they observe the cooperating teacher, in the classroom they are assigned to student-teach in, without questioning what stands behind these approaches (Lortie, 2020). An example of this is readily found in classroom dialogue. Howe and Abedin (2013) claim that the IRF pattern of initiation-response-feedback is still the most used in classroom talk. A teacher initiates a topic by asking a closed question where the answer is usually known. The children, in turn, respond to the question by giving answers they think the teacher wants to hear. The teacher is navigating the dialogue as to *who* will speak

and *when* they will speak, leaving almost no opportunities for free talk (Mehan, 1979). The teacher then gives the children feedback on their answers. If the desired answer was given, the children are praised, however if a different answer was heard, they are either ignored or scolded.

Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012) propose a different perspective on classroom dialogue which is based on child-centered learning. It allows the children to demonstrate their knowledge on topics that interest them, which in turn will lead to a strong sense of competence. The teacher then responds with positive feedback on their *willingness to participate* in the dialogue, rather than *judge the content* that is being discussed, as right or wrong. This provides open spaces for children to share their thoughts and ideas without fear of judgement on the part of the teacher.

Heath (1983) refers to the term, authentic dialogue, as the need for teachers to focus on the thinking processes that children go through rather than the actual knowledge they are obtaining, if at all. The way in which a teacher responds to children's answers, acknowledging *how* they came about their answers, and showing an interest in their explanations, creates open spaces for authentic dialogue. This is in tune with early childhood education training programs that have adopted similar ideas, known as constructivist pedagogy (Li et al., 2012). The child is at the center of their learning experience by initiating ideas and activities based on their interests (Porcaro, 2011).

Similar to professionals in other fields, teachers need to pursue further training after completing their initial qualifications through a process referred to as continuing professional development.

### 3. Research methodology

The present research aims to examine and analyze the reflections attained through interviews with pre-service teacher's that participated in an authentic dialogue training program and the impact it had on their perceptions of a teacher's role of conducting authentic dialogue with preschoolers.

#### 3.1. Research participants

The participants were all female, average age of 26 years old and were all third-year students in the Early Childhood Educational Department at Kaye College of Education in Israel. They all lived in the southern part of Israel and were randomly chosen from the experimental group. They volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher for a one-on-one semi-structured interview in the teacher's lounge in the

college where they are students. This is an informal familiar environment, which made them feel comfortable, as the training program took place there as well. The researcher used many authentic dialogic characteristics taught in the training program such as open questions, delaying reactions, responsiveness, suspension of teacher's control and mutuality in dialogue. This was used in order for their responses to be as reflective as possible, displaying personal perspectives and not directed by the researcher.

#### 3.2. Data collection

All of the interviews were tape recorded with written consent forms and analyzed. The analyzation process was important in order to categorize recurring themes amongst their responses. This enabled the researcher to reach conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the authentic dialogic training program on the pre-service teachers' perceptions of conducting authentic dialogue.

#### 3.3. Instrument

The data from the interviews were analyzed in a qualitative fashion. Creswell (2021) states that when a researcher wants to understand what the participants are feeling and thinking with regard to questions asked in an interview, it is important to analyze their responses to problems that arose in the training program itself. This can help the researcher understand how the participant reacted and if they were able to use the tools being tested. In the training program, the participants were first asked to conduct a dialogue with a child, as they normally do without any prior instruction and transcribe it. The second dialogue was conducted after they participated in the training program and were taught authentic dialogue characteristics. A challenge they faced was they began to inhibit their responses, thinking of every word they uttered as to keep in line with authentic dialogue characteristics. They felt that the dialogue became unnatural, interrupted and not continuous, which led to a sense of frustration. These reflective thoughts were heard loud and clear in their interview responses and as Shkedi (2011) states, these uninhibited words help the researcher better analyze their emotions and reach conclusions.

## 4. Results

While analyzing the participants reflections, the research question that was posed was "Will the reflections of the pre-service teacher signify that the authentic dialogue training program had an effect on

the way they perceive their role of achieving authentic dialogue with preschoolers?"

Through content analysis of the in-depth semi structured interviews conducted, the main themes that were discovered are noted in the figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Themes from reflective interviews



As seen in Figure 1, there are six main themes that will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. Foremost, pre-service teachers felt that they had a better sense of social-emotional competencies after participating in the training program. They improved their personal skills; were more attentive, less judgmental and more accepting of children's stories. In addition, they trusted children's abilities to resolve conflicts on their own without their interventions. They explained this as the training program enabled them to recognize the importance of empowering children, listening to their unique perspectives. They themselves, felt empowered and were better able to put children's needs before their own, thus improving their social and emotional competencies.

In addition, teachers became aware as to the positive effects that authentic dialogue has on a child's emotional needs. They saw that when children choose the topics for the dialogue, they led the conversation rather than being led by the teacher. Furthermore, they became equal partners in the dialogue, no single voice was more important than the other, as was previously seen. Teachers understood better that their role in the dialogue is to be an attentive listener rather than a constant speaker.

Moreover, the fact that the pre-service teachers felt that authentic dialogue has on a child's well-being was very exciting. They stressed that children had a stronger sense of social capability once experiencing authentic dialogue. They felt more connected to their peers because open spaces were created for all

perspectives to be valued. Children were able to speak of anything they wanted, and the teacher in turn asked open questions related to the same topic. The children felt that what they said, mattered, hence a strong sense of capability was achieved.

As well as the contribution of authentic dialogue to the children, the pre-service teachers spoke of one of the authentic dialogue characteristics, often overlooked, that of discourse etiquette. They were surprised as to how children learned to be considerate of others words, waited until there was a gap in the conversation to say what was on their mind. They learned very fast, how to take turns while speaking. The teacher required this of all staff members and discourse etiquette became part of preschool culture.

Additionally, the participants spoke of the contribution the program had on their personal relationships with regard to dialogue. This bores insight as to the importance not only of the content matter but as to the pedagogy of the program as well. The participants described friends and family members intrigued as to their abilities to be more attentive in conversations, less judgmental, less dominating and more considerate to different perspectives. They reflected on the the way that conducting authentic dialogue with other teachers in the program, something that helped them better understand the characteristics and made it easier for them to converse with children in this manner. In addition, this type of dialogue, became a way of life. Thus, their friends and family noticed a difference in their dialogic capabilities.

Finally, all of the ten participants spoke of the need for more in-service training programs on the topic of authentic dialogue from their first year of academic schooling. This can help them early on conduct dialogue in a more authentic fashion and break perceptions they have of a teacher's role in dialogue. The more traditional role of "teaching" or "reprimanding". They found that they were better able to conduct open dialogue with staff members as well as parents of preschoolers.

## 5. Discussions

The results indicate a generally favorable attitude towards the topics taught in the authentic dialogue training program. Interview responses strongly suggest a shift in participants' perspectives on the role a teacher has of classroom dialogue. The consensus was that the pre-service teachers understand that they have a significant influence on the educational atmosphere in the preschool, primarily through their

dialogic interactions with children. They emphasized that fostering an authentic, child-centered dialogue that aligns with the children's interests, rather than solely adhering to predetermined teaching goals, cultivates a warm, caring, and empathetic environment. Consequently, this approach facilitates the emotional and social development of the children involved.

Traditionally, pre-service teachers formed their perceptions based on their own experiences as students, envisioning the teacher as the authority figure at the front of the classroom, imparting knowledge and expecting students to absorb it. Communication primarily involved conveying tasks and addressing misbehavior or incomplete tasks.

After participation in the training program, they recognized that dialogue is a crucial tool for fostering a child's sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and social self-worth, and it should be treated with high regard. The skills acquired during the program have swiftly influenced their perspective on a teacher's role in authentic dialogue. Additionally, the participants reflected on important skills acquired, such as; attentive listening, accepting, and incorporating diverse perspectives, fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and just environment for open dialogues.

One of the most profound revelations that came about in their reflections was their surprise of the effects the skills they learned with regard to improving dialogue with children, actually improved their dialogic interactions in their personal lives. They felt more comfortable and became more open to embracing moments of silence without worrying about losing interest in the conversation, showcasing an enhanced ability to be attentive listeners by delaying responses. They felt that they improved their social and emotional competencies as they incorporated authentic characteristics into their personal lives. This came about by expressing increased awareness for those around them, including their opinions and perspectives and improved their abilities to regulate their own emotions.

Roberts et al. (2021) claim that researchers can comprehend participants' thought processes and actions by analyzing the reflections they convey through interviews conducted. Conway (2001) emphasized the significance of the reflective process that teachers undergo for their professional development. This importance arises from the need to find common ground when old experiences intersect with new ones, making it essential for individuals to process and deem them meaningful. Reflection equips pre-service teachers to revisit their own perceptions of

their role a teacher has on conducting classroom dialogue and their own personal experiences, enable them to draw on past insights as they anticipate creating meaningful relationships with their future students.

Boyd et al. (2015) emphasizes that the reflective process serves as the foundation for comprehending teaching practices. It elucidates that despite receiving training in advanced educational theories and pedagogical skills, pre-service teachers often default to traditional teaching methods due to their personal experiences. Whether influenced by methods they appreciated or feared as students, revisiting these experiences becomes imperative. This stems from the idea that teachers aim to shield their students from negative experiences or strive to enhance them, as articulated by Hamman et al. (2010)

According to Miller and Shifflet (2016), this holds particularly true for teachers who shape their teaching perspectives based on their own experiences. When a teacher observes success in one context, they endeavor to apply it elsewhere (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). Following the realization that authentic dialogic skills personally benefited them, the participants were motivated and developed a sense of competence in their ability to engage in authentic dialogue with preschoolers.

With respect to the analyzation process undergone with recorded interviews, as outlined by Saldaña (2016), a crucial step involves cross-referencing data obtained from the various interviews. This facilitates the identification of recurring themes and establishes correlations with the research questions. Qualitative analysis stands out due to its capacity to gather extensive data through tools like interviews. The identification of common themes and categories serves the purpose of drawing conclusions regarding the participants' thoughts, feelings, and reflections throughout the research.

Creswell (2014) clarifies that in qualitative studies, creating an informal in-person setting when being interviewed, fosters participants comfort, reducing anxiety and promoting a more open dialogue. The interview initiation involved casual discussions about the participant's well-being and that of their families. Another rationale for conducting the interview face-to-face is to enable the researcher to gather information about both verbal and nonverbal communication, recognizing their equal significance. The spoken words and nonverbal cues captured by the researcher provide valuable insights into the participants' thoughts, especially when responding to

follow-up questions, a benefit unique to semi-structured interviews. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) assert that face-to-face interviews encourage participants to elaborate more, particularly in response to follow-up queries.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper attempted to describe the importance of pre-service teachers' reflections after participation in an authentic dialogue training program. The qualitative tool of a semi-structured interview, served as a valuable reflective instrument, fostering a thorough examination of one's experiences, thoughts, and actions to facilitate learning and enhance future practices. Reflective thinking holds particular significance in teacher development, empowering educators to critically assess their teaching methods and implement changes for improved student learning (Mathew et al., 2017).

Reflective thinking contributes to teacher development by pinpointing areas in which teachers feel confident and those they find challenging, prompting a recognition of necessary improvements (Shoffner, 2008). According to Kizel (2014), reflective thinking aids teachers in developing heightened self-awareness by prompting an exploration of their perceptions. This self-awareness, in turn, enables teachers to comprehend their teaching style and its impact on student learning. Additionally, reflective thinking fosters a willingness among teachers to experiment with new approaches and techniques in the classroom.

In conclusion, it is crucial to acknowledge that preschool teachers hold individual perspectives on the role of dialogue in teaching. These perspectives significantly shape the way their classroom functions with regard to dialogue. Through reflective thinking, the teachers came to the realization that opening spaces for a child-centered dialogue, while embracing diverse voices may enhance the creation of a positive, empathetic classroom environment for education. Dialogue serves as a valuable instrument in fostering children's social and emotional competence as well as bolster their self-assurance. This most definitely will have a positive effect on the classroom environment. Children will be more tolerant, solve problems through dialogue and not with force, respect each other's views and most important display the ability to be active listeners as their teachers are there to model this behavior. Children naturally adjust to the teaching methods they encounter, therefore, teachers that are aware of the importance of providing open spaces for

dialogue, where both positive and negative emotions are able to be expressed, are helping children with life-long dialogic abilities needed in society.

## Authors note:

**Barbara Shapir** has successfully completed her PhD at the Doctoral School "Education, Reflection, Development", Babes -Bolyai University, Romania. She is working as the Head of First Year Studies at Kaye Academic College of Education in Israel, as well as a Lecturer, Pedagogical advisor and practical fieldwork coordinator in the Early Childhood Department. Her professional and research interests are: Pre-service Teachers Training Programs, Authentic Dialogue, Social Emotional Learning and Teacher's Role Perceptions. The following are relevant articles:

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