

**Response to the Committee for the Evaluation of Education and
Science Education Study Programs**

School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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Following the evaluation report we submitted to the Council for Higher Education, the international committee visited the School of Education at the Hebrew University. During the visit which took place on June 18th-19th, 2014, the committee met with faculty members, adjunct teachers, students in all degree levels and programs as well as with members of the administrative staff. The committee's findings and recommendations were summarized in a report which was submitted to the School of Education in October 2014. The report was shared with members of the School of Education in several phases. After it was discussed by the heads of the School, it was shared with members of the School's Development Committee, members of the Teaching Committee, and finally with the entire faculty in a general meeting.

The following response to the evaluation committee's report reflects the reactions expressed by the faculty members in the various cycles. Our response is structured in two main sections; first we present some general comments and in the second section we refer to specific issues raised in the committee's report.

I. General Comments

The involvement of all members of the School in the preparation of the self-evaluation report was a unique process which created collaborations and intensive investments of time and thought during an entire academic year. We thank the committee members for their willingness to devote time and effort to this evaluation process. We were gratified that many of the committee's recommendations echo the objectives that we ourselves emphasized in our self-evaluation report and in our meetings with the committee. Indeed, our evaluation report, submitted prior to the external evaluation, documents a number of long-term processes designed to reinforce our strengths, address our weaknesses, and support our continuing growth as a center of educational excellence, rigor, and relevance, often in ways very similar to the recommendations of the evaluation committee. This congruence is only infrequently acknowledged in the evaluation committee's report. This affirmation, however, from a distinguished group of experts is a valuable signal to our faculty and to the administration of the Hebrew University that we are on the right track. That said, our impression is that in formulating its recommendations the committee paid insufficient attention to contextual affordances and constraints that are crucial in deciding what should

and can be done. These include the areas of expertise and excellence of our current faculty and programs, alongside the dramatic attrition in faculty positions in recent years. Similarly, little attention was paid to changes in the structure of higher education in Israel, notably the significant increase in the number of colleges and in the academic and teacher preparation programs they are authorized to offer, and the decline in financial support for research universities. Careful consideration of the context in which organizations operate is a major aspect of strategic planning and a major determinant of its success in charting and maintaining sustainable paths from the generically desirable to the specifically feasible and possible. Such considerations inform our responses to the committee's observations and recommendations.

II. Responses to Major Themes in the Evaluation Report

A. The role of Schools of Education

Inevitably, the committee's evaluation is influenced by beliefs about the role of Schools of Education in research universities. In essence, the position of the committee seems to be that our School should focus most of its resources and efforts on teacher education because universities are the main suppliers of teachers for secondary schools. While obviously embracing the crucial importance of teacher education, we do not agree that this is or should be at the heart of all that we do. First, as befits a unit in the Hebrew University, our faculty is committed to excellence in research, and to the education of future generations of researchers. Second, the committee seemed to overlook the fact that schooling is not only about teachers. Many other professionals work in the context of public schooling: educational psychologists, school counselors, school principals, and specialists in special education and learning disabilities. We are committed to teaching and training these educational professionals to the highest standards and we have a recognized record of professional education in these fields. It is not clear to us why the evaluation report did not relate to these core fields of professional practice. In all events, we subscribe to a broad vision that necessarily includes, but is not limited to the provision and continuing improvement of high quality teacher education.

B. Formulating a strategic plan for the School of Education

Like other academic units in the Hebrew University, the School of Education has two standing committees responsible for strategic planning: The Development Committee, which is responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring strategic planning and the

Teaching Committee which focuses on curricular issues. Several issues highlighted by the report have been at the center of strategic planning and implementation in the School of Education for several years. As we described in our meetings with the Committee, we have been engaged over the years in evaluating and updating the structure, content, and number of MA programs. As a result, some programs were indeed phased out (at one point we offered an unsustainable 13 MA degree programs), others were revised (e.g., Division for Learning and Instruction), and some new programs were introduced (e.g., Division for Learning Disabilities). In keeping with our own priorities and the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee, we shall continue to review curricula at the BA and MA levels, including the number and types of specializations and tracks, and the organizational structure of the School, as they bear also on future faculty hires. We do not think that there is a need to establish a new committee for strategic planning within the School of Education. We shall, however, welcome a joint initiative of the School of Education and the university authorities to establish a forum in which we can discuss and finalize strategic objectives for the continuing development of the School of Education and how best to achieve them.

C. Teacher Education

The Committee's report touches on some of the central issues which confront the Department of Teacher Education in its aspiration to improve and progress. An important insight of the report is the need for a greater integration of the Department within the School of Education and a greater involvement of senior faculty. Steps that have already been taken in this direction include the full membership of the Head of Department in the School's Teaching Committee, regular and frequent meetings of the Head of Department with the Heads of the School of Education as well as cross-listing of courses with the various graduate tracks in the School of Education. No doubt more needs to be done to effect a cultural change whereby faculty and students come to perceive greater integration and senior faculty are more involved both in teaching in and as expert consultants to the department. However we should underline that in the last decade the program and the structure of the Department underwent and still undergoes constant major changes aimed at improving in all aspects through the compliance with the requirements of the Council of Higher Education ("Ariav Guidelines").

1. It would indeed be desirable for the department if academic appointments were made of researchers with an expertise in the teaching of various fields. Following an extended

period in which the faculty of the School has contracted substantially it is not surprising that this gap exists. It should be noted, however, that at least five senior faculty members do have a strong research record in fields specifically noted by the report as priority areas. All five teach regular courses in the Department and involve themselves in other ways in its program.

2. Science education is clearly a national priority and the recruitment of students in this area has always been a priority for the Department. The Department has enhanced cooperation with the relevant faculties to develop a strong program in the teaching of the sciences; for example some of our courses are taught at the Givat Ram campus and we have initiated joint programs with the faculty of Sciences. Note also Section V:1 below.

3. The need for an effective interaction between theory and practice is an ever present theme in the discussion of teacher education everywhere. It is a matter which the department needs to continue to address at every level including strengthening student understanding of how theoretical knowledge can be used in the service of good practice. This issue should be one of foci for discussing the revision of the existing curriculum but it needs to be addressed also by creating a more effective dialogue between those responsible for the more theoretical aspects of the program and those engaged in supervising the practicum.

3. The report highlights “Revivim” as a bright spot in teacher education. It might be noted that a former head and the present head of the Department of Teacher Education were among the founding directors of education in Revivim, shaping its conception of teacher preparation and bringing its first graduates to the field. An obvious point to be made here is the dedication of resources which made possible substantial scholarships and stipends as well as a substantial investment in tutoring and mentoring over the length of the program. The report states that to date, few efforts have been made to observe the teaching practices of Revivim graduates and to gauge the learning of their students. It should be noted that in the coming months Revivim is planning an external evaluation that will address these issues.

4. The report describes the high proportion of elective courses somewhat dismissively as a “potpourri”. The elective program can also be regarded as a considered response to a field in which there is no settled view of the core learning which beginning teachers need. An elective program gives expression to a pluralistic understanding of the role of the teacher and her professional preparation. It is, however, appropriate at this point to reappraise the balance of required and elective courses and to consider the rationale of each element in the program.

5. Mention should be made of the recent appointment of three subject matter coordinators each responsible for clusters of teaching areas broadly under the headings of Natural Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences. Together with the Academic Director of

the Department they form a leadership team and a forum for the discussion of the direction of the Department. Unfortunately they remain half-time appointments but even with current limitations there is progress towards better direction of the department and the development of greater cohesion.

6. Two years ago we embarked on an important initiative whereby Professor Anat Zohar led a process of review of teacher education together with the Head of Department and the newly appointed coordinators. This initiative was still ongoing during the self-evaluation process and was thus not presented in the self-evaluation report. Needless to say, the process began with a review of best-practice in the field of teacher education and proceeded to propose changes in the program better to meet the needs of today's (and tomorrow's) new teachers. Thus the recommendation of the report to create a faculty committee to do this has already been implemented. It is possible that we neglected to bring this to the attention of the committee in the course of their visit. Some of the proposals that emerged from this process mirror points made in the Evaluation Committee report, particularly with respect to the connection between theory and practice in teacher preparation.

7. We continue to negotiate with University authorities the possibility of providing the appropriate academic accreditation that will enable us to offer students MA degree programs that combine teacher certification with relevant MA tracks in the School of Education. We are hopeful that the Evaluation Report will contribute to expediting this process, which the School has been attempting to promote since 2000.

III. Topics mentioned in the report that are currently being addressed:

1. In the last two years a new model of cooperation between the School of Education vis-à-vis the Melton Centre has been discussed that will substantially expand the existing cooperation between the units. Decisions on these proposals will be taken next year.

2. Written guidelines that make explicit the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants have been formulated and are being implemented. In addition, we have initiated workshops aimed at clarifying the role expectations and professional conduct of teaching assistants.

3. The School of Education conducts regular workshops for Ph.D students on various topics. In addition, we offer two courses in academic writing and publication, one for qualitative and one for quantitative research. We liked the further recommendation to create a cross-disciplinary seminar in which doctoral students present their work and receive feedback from peers and faculty and we intend to implement it in the near future.

4. The School of Education works together with the Dean of Students' Office in tracking dropouts and understanding its causes. In the past three years, the School of Education has assigned a coordinator to lead this process.

5. The School of Education works with the department of public relations and marketing to enhance the School's visibility in the community. This year the School will reinforce its presence through website and social networks. We agree that the School should do and will do more to strengthen in its public impact.

6. In addition to student course ratings, we will continue to conduct peer evaluations of teaching, and we will proceed with the review of syllabi. We shall also continue with our mentorship program for junior faculty in which mentors provide pedagogical feedback and guidance.

7. Technology-mediated and assisted learning: We were one of the first units to fully computerize our classrooms and, as a result, this year we have been obliged to devote considerable human and financial resources to replacing now outdated equipment. We agree that there is need for improvement in extending and deepening the use of technology mediated learning. We shall direct the Teaching Committee to suggest concrete recommendations.

IV. Recommendations about which we have reservations

1. The committee recommended that the School of Education use a consistent means of ranking international journals (for example, Thomson ISI) rather than relying on its own criteria. As we explained in our report, alongside ISI, HU has developed and uses the Jerusalem Index. In our report we provided both IF and JI for faculty publications.

2. The committee recommended that the School of Education should develop ways to maintain contact with alumni and to track their activities. Unlike the US, Israel does not have a culture of alumni involvement in higher education. Given the many more pressing demands, investing time and resources to try to create such a culture is not a priority for us.

V. Recommendations that require institutional support and/or funding

1. Allocation of new faculty positions is always welcome, especially by a unit that has lost more than half of its positions in the last 14 years.

We completely concur with the importance of teaching and learning of science and mathematics. Following the committee's report, we hope that the University Administration will reconsider our request, first presented and rejected three years ago, to re-establish a program in Science Education in the School of Education and to allocate new faculty positions in this area.

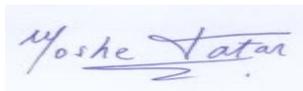
We would also welcome an appointment in measurement and evaluation, as recommended by the Committee. More generally, we are in need of faculty positions that will enable us to maintain the quality of our teaching, training, and research.

A significant area of expertise overlooked by the committee is, in our opinion, our excellent professional MA programs in Educational and Clinical Child Psychology, Educational Counselling, Learning Disabilities, and School Leadership and Administration. Not surprisingly, these programs are in high demand, but more faculty positions are urgently needed to maintain their continuing viability. Last year, we were, however, able to make a new appointment to our division of Learning Disabilities.

2. Allocation of resources by the University to subsidize student access to both quantitative and qualitative software will be very helpful.

3. Regarding the recommendation that the School of Education should become autonomous from the Faculty of Humanities, we believe that such a change will facilitate the attainment of School of Education's goals under the right conditions, which include allocation of additional administrative and faculty positions.

To conclude, we would like to reiterate that we experienced the evaluation process initiated by the Council for Higher Education as very beneficial to our continuing organizational learning and development.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Moshe Tatar". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Moshe Tatar Ph.D., Anna Lazarus Professor of Education,
Director School of Education