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U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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FILE: EAC 05 128 51824 Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER Date: JUL 30 2007

IN RE: Petitioner: [Redacted]
Beneficiary: [Redacted]

PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the
Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:
[Redacted]

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

Michael T. Kelly
for Robert P. Wiemann, Chief
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The director denied the nonimmigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The director's decision will be withdrawn. The petition will be remanded to the director for further action and the entry of a new decision.

The petitioner is a preschool that seeks to employ the beneficiary as a preschool teacher. The petitioner, therefore, endeavors to classify the beneficiary as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition on the basis of his determination that the petitioner had failed to establish that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation.

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's denial letter; (3) the director's request for additional evidence; (4) the petitioner's response to the director's request; and (5) the Form I-290B and supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The term "specialty occupation" is further defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as:

An occupation which requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualification for classification as a specialty occupation, the proposed position must meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or

- (4) The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proposed position.

Identified as a day-care center on the Form I-129, the petitioner is, according to its March 31, 2005 letter of support and subsequently submitted documentation, an American-Israeli preschool that offers preschool education to children between the ages of 18 months and five years. It seeks to employ the beneficiary as its Head Hebrew Teacher. According to the petitioner's letter of support, the duties of the proposed position would include planning and implementing the religious and Hebrew curriculum for the entire school; providing religious and Hebrew instruction to 14 children; teaching Judaic subjects such as Hebrew, the Torah, the Bible, Jewish holidays, Jewish songs and music, Bible stories, Jewish tradition, Jewish hymns, and Sabbath sanctification customs; observing children to identify their individual growth abilities, strengths, and interests; encouraging students in activities, such as singing, dancing, and field trips, so as to promote self-expression and growth; creating meaningful arts and crafts projects; preparing the school for Jewish holidays, such as purchasing holiday-related articles, decorations, and booklets, and preparing holiday parties; providing pre-reading instructions in Hebrew; teaching Hebrew vocabulary; organizing and conducting the Sabbath ceremony; and discussing children's progress and problems with parents.

The petitioner has submitted evidence regarding the educational background of its other preschool teachers, all of whom have at least a baccalaureate degree in a field directly related to the position. One has a master's degree in education, one has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, and another was trained as an early childhood teacher in Israel. The other two both have New York State Public School Teaching Certification, which requires the attainment of a baccalaureate degree.

The proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under the criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), which requires a demonstration that the petitioner normally requires a baccalaureate degree, or its equivalent, for the position. To determine a petitioner's ability to meet this criterion, the AAO normally reviews the petitioner's past employment practices, as well as the histories, of those employees with degrees who previously held the position. The AAO finds that the petitioner has met its burden of proof under this criterion.

However, the AAO may not approve the petition at this time. The record, as currently constituted, does not establish that the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of a specialty occupation. Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C), to qualify to perform services in a specialty occupation, an alien must meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) Hold a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;
- (2) Hold a foreign degree determined to be equivalent to a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;

- (3) Hold an unrestricted state license, registration or certification which authorizes him or her to fully practice the specialty occupation and be immediately engaged in that specialty in the state of intended employment; or
- (4) Have education, specialized training, and/or progressively responsible experience that is equivalent to completion of a United States baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty occupation, and have recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty.

In making its determination as to whether the beneficiary qualifies to perform the duties of a specialty occupation, the AAO turns to the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C), as described above, which requires a demonstration that the beneficiary holds a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university.

The first criterion requires a showing that the beneficiary earned a baccalaureate or higher degree from a United States institution of higher education. The beneficiary did not earn a degree in the United States, so she does not qualify under this criterion.

Nor does the beneficiary qualify under the second criterion, which requires a demonstration that the beneficiary's foreign degree has been determined to be equivalent to a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university. The record contains an evaluation of credentials, dated March 13, 2005, performed by [REDACTED], an associate professor in Nova Southeastern University's Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

While [REDACTED] did determine that the combination of the beneficiary's foreign education and experience are equivalent to a bachelor's degree in education with a major in early childhood education, this evaluation does not satisfy 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(2). In order to qualify under this criterion, the evaluation must be based solely upon the beneficiary's foreign degree.

The record does not demonstrate, nor has the petitioner contended, that the beneficiary holds an unrestricted state license, registration or certification to practice the specialty occupation, so he does not qualify under the third criterion, either.

The fourth criterion, set forth at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4), requires a showing that the beneficiary's education, specialized training, and/or progressively responsible experience is equivalent to the completion of a United States baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty occupation, and that the beneficiary also has recognition of that expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty.

Thus, it is the fourth criterion under which the petitioner must classify the beneficiary's combination of education and work experience. Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D), equating a beneficiary's credentials to a United States baccalaureate or higher degree is determined by one or more of the following:

- (1) An evaluation from an official who has authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in the specialty at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience;

- (2) The results of recognized college-level equivalency examinations or special credit programs, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), or Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI);
- (3) An evaluation of education by a reliable credentials evaluation service which specializes in evaluating foreign educational credentials;
- (4) Evidence of certification or registration from a nationally-recognized professional association or society for the specialty that is known to grant certification or registration to persons in the occupational specialty who have achieved a certain level of competence in the specialty;
- (5) A determination by the Service that the equivalent of the degree required by the specialty occupation has been acquired through a combination of education, specialized training, and/or work experience in areas related to the specialty and that the alien has achieved recognition of expertise in the specialty occupation as a result of such training and experience.

The beneficiary does not qualify under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1), as there has been no demonstration that [REDACTED] author of the aforementioned evaluation, possesses the authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in education at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience in education or a related field. Although [REDACTED] states that he is "qualified to assign college credit for professional work experience at Nova Southeastern University," he has submitted no evidence to support this assertion. Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)). The AAO also notes that [REDACTED] did not state specifically, or submit evidence to demonstrate, that he has the authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in the field of education. Nor did he state, or submit evidence to demonstrate, that Nova Southeastern University has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience in the field of education.¹ Moreover, the AAO questions [REDACTED] expertise in evaluating work experience in the field of education, particularly early childhood education, as it does not appear from his submitted credentials that he has any training, expertise, or work experience in this field. For all of these reasons, this evaluation is deficient for purposes of establishing eligibility under this criterion.

No evidence has been submitted to establish, nor has the petitioner contended, that the beneficiary satisfies 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(2), which requires that the beneficiary submit the results of recognized college-level equivalency examinations or special credit programs, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), or Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI).

¹ The AAO will not accept a faculty member's opinion as to the college-credit equivalent of a particular person's work experience or training, unless authoritative, independent evidence from the official's college or university – such as a letter from the appropriate dean or provost – establishes that the official is authorized to grant academic credit of that institution, in the pertinent specialty, on the basis of training or work experience, and that such authorization is pursuant to a program at that educational institution for granting that institution's credits in the pertinent specialty on the basis of training or work experience.

Nor does the beneficiary satisfy 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(3). As was the case under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(2), the beneficiary is unqualified under this criterion because the evaluation submitted by the petitioner is deficient.

No evidence has been submitted to establish, nor has the petitioner contended, that the beneficiary satisfies 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(4), which requires that the beneficiary submit evidence of certification or registration from a nationally-recognized professional association or society for the specialty that is known to grant certification or registration to persons in the occupational specialty who have achieved a certain level of competence in the specialty.

The AAO next turns to the fifth criterion. When CIS determines an alien's qualifications pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5), three years of specialized training and/or work experience must be demonstrated for each year of college-level training the alien lacks. It must be clearly demonstrated that the alien's training and/or work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge required by the specialty occupation; that the alien's experience was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who have a degree or its equivalent in the specialty occupation; and that the alien has recognition of expertise in the specialty evidenced by at least one type of documentation such as:

- (i) Recognition of expertise in the specialty occupation by at least two recognized authorities in the same specialty occupation²;
- (ii) Membership in a recognized foreign or United States association or society in the specialty occupation;
- (iii) Published material by or about the alien in professional publications, trade journals, books, or major newspapers;
- (iv) Licensure or registration to practice the specialty occupation in a foreign country;
or
- (v) Achievements which a recognized authority has determined to be significant contributions to the field of the specialty occupation.

While the record contains several letters of reference regarding the beneficiary's work history, they do not establish that this work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge required by the specialty, that it was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who held a bachelor's degree or its equivalent in education, and that she achieved recognition of expertise in the field as evidenced by at least one of the five types of documentation delineated in sections (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), or (v) of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5).

² *Recognized authority* means a person or organization with expertise in a particular field, special skills or knowledge in that field, and the expertise to render the type of opinion requested. A recognized authority's opinion must state: (1) the writer's qualifications as an expert; (2) the writer's experience giving such opinions, citing specific instances where past opinions have been accepted as authoritative and by whom; (3) how the conclusions were reached; and (4) the basis for the conclusions supported by copies or citations of any research material used. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

Accordingly, the beneficiary does not qualify under any of the criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1)(2)(3)(4), or (5), and therefore by extension does not qualify under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4).

Therefore, the AAO is unable to find the beneficiary qualified to perform the duties of the specialty occupation at this time. However, the director did not address this issue. Thus, the director's decision will be withdrawn and the matter remanded for the entry of a new decision. The director may afford the petitioner reasonable time to provide evidence pertinent to the issue of whether the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of this specialty occupation. The director shall then render a new decision based on the evidence of record as it relates to the regulatory requirements for eligibility.

As always, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361.

ORDER: The director's October 24, 2005 decision is withdrawn. The petition is remanded to the director for entry of a new decision, which, if adverse to the petitioner, is to be certified to the AAO for review.