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## Teacher Education and its Reflection

A b s t r a c t   This paper focuses on recent problems of Hungarian student-teachers preparing for their career, from the point of view of training. The aim of the study is to reveal those problems which affect the beginners' role and which came from the dis/function of teacher education. Supposedly, the nucleus of the would-be-teachers' problems is interconnected with low prestige of the profession, existence, skills and material or professional uncertainty. Another crucial issue is the impact of the teacher education, the efficacy of the training. The aim of this paper is to investigate the real obstacles of the efficiency of teacher education, what these problems are, how stressful they are and how they impact the student-teacher's self-confidence. It has also an actuality, since teacher training stands before a changeover and still the transition between the former traditional and the BA and MA levels of higher education has not yet been examined, so these remarks can also add somewhat to the forthcoming teacher training program and – at the collective level – to the identification of issues important to the community of teachers, would-be-teachers and both in-service teachers and educators.

## Problem Identification

The tradition of higher education, structure and values strongly leave their mark on future teachers' professional competence. The current teacher training practice, in most cases, prepares the student-teachers to the role of a 'cultural mediator' – in the traditional sense, which means that the teacher education hardly provides the means of the various genres of oral and written communication, resources of arguing, in developing existing current language-performance, reflection on their mistakes (Zsolnai, 2011). However the would-be-students are expected to have these skills and competencies (e.g. giving presentations, especially by the end of their studies, on final examination, holding lectures at conferences, publish, using online and interactive tools etc.) As very often the teacher-educators forget that the knowledge itself is built on at least two components: *productive* and *reproductive*. At most teacher education institutions *repetition* (e. g. imitation, 'quasi-practice', copying the 'best practice') but not *production* is still emphasized during the training (problem-based courses, innovation, evidence and research-based teacher education). The problem is not only in that the future teachers are suffering from the lack of the newest methodological tools during their professional socialization but they will not transfer these (missing) competences, knowledge, skills to their own teacher career and due to this their future students, pupils will have been missed these competences, as well.

## Research and literature Antecedents: standards and enrollment

There is a long time since the forming of the competence-standards of teacher profession has started on international playground (Mrazik, 2011). If one sees the internationally forming teacher competence-standards in national relation it can be stated that however lists describing teachers' competences and skills have come to existence but the national teacher training is rather tacit about them. Professional teacher standardizations have been developed also in Hungary related the teacher profession, but these standards are neither legal nor seem to be valid for the profession (the so called 'professiograms', published in Zsolnai and Kocsis(1997)and 'standards' (Kotschy, 2011). In addition, some publications were born related to this issue (Dezső, 2011; Fábián, 2011; Kocsis et al., 2012), but these were hardly embedded in the newest intention of the policy makers called 'Career Model of the Pedagogue'(also known as 'Teacher Career Model' or 'Teacher Career Path')acted in September of 2013. It is interesting that the *teacher competences (table 3.)* expected from the teacher by the end of his or her training fulfilled also not representing the part of the assessment of the teachers' achievement. Only the *portfolio* has been mentioned as the tool of assessment of teachers' achievement.

However enrollment in teacher training in tertiary education institutions fall under entrance examination, less possibilities to select the unsuitable applicants for the teacher profession (for example suffering from mental illnesses or utterance problems and even harder to predict several long-term prognoses for their future (university and practice) career. These two issues – output competences proved by portfolio and Assessment of teachers by their 'Career Path' are and are very much interconnected but at the same time they are far enough from each other: the above mentioned teacher competences (or, at least its traces) demanded as outcome of the teacher education is completely missing in the preliminary filtering. In case of analyzing these two sets of competences on the base of such indicators, like attitude, values, knowledge, experience, skills, practice, structural behavior, impact/acceptance (Arató& Varga 2005; 2006; Arató 2013; Bálint 2013; Dezső 2011; Mrázik 2010), a very diverse picture is being formed.

## Theory and reality

Many publications report that higher education, as well as teacher training has expanded to an extreme degree (Zsolnainé et al., 2011) and the teacher educators perceive this phenomenon, the methodology and the traditional understanding of 'teaching ethos' has remained the same. The paradigm of teaching has still not performed into paradigm of 'learning', only at few teacher training institutes. Even in such environment there is a huge need for individual training, personalized teaching and techniques as many of teacher educators feel and intending to do it. Not only teacher educators but teaching representatives of legal, economical or

medical profession consider that a renewed, different methodology is needed in adult education which characteristics is *better, effective involvement of students* into productive learning, as motivation; *question* and *research based* courses; *learning* and *learner-centered education* instead of teacher and teacher centered one. "Methodological culture of teachers – classroom work is still dominated by frontal teaching, although recently increasing efforts have been made to involve more differentiated methods, for example cooperative teaching, less rigid class structures, and use of ITC. The most frequently used method of organisation of the teaching-learning process is differentiation within a heterogeneous class. The picture is highly diverse by educational programs: differentiated class work is a lot more prevalent in general schools, and ICT is more frequently used in secondary institutions." (Szekszardi, 2006) A further problematic feature is the teacher-pupil interaction: "There is a contradiction between students' expectations from the school and the school's values as perceived by students. While students expect the school to help them develop their personality and increase their self-reliance, in their opinion the school considers strengthening discipline and community-minded attitude to be its most important job. Students enjoy school tasks less and less, fewer of them think they have a say in shaping school rules, and they increasingly feel oppressed by school assignments and their image of teachers has been deteriorating." (Szekszardi, 2006) An enormous part of students in schools worships a so called 'youth subculture' (Zsolnai, 2011), or see "black legend" of adolescence (Bálint, 2013) so sometimes they are very often alienated from education. Inequalities, treatment of disabilities in classroom, violence (often unreasonable) and aggression are further threatening phenomena in the schools, while would-be-teachers are given only lectures about these topics (if they are) and they have less possibilities to try their competences in realistic environment. "Problem of the aggression is more and more conspicuous within the school walls. Surveys conducted among school children reveal the grievances (mostly originating from teachers) students of different ages foster. The most frequent occurrences are related to evaluation in a broad sense. In a lot of schools the judgmental and disciplinary function of evaluation seems to be more prevalent than necessary. In many cases the educational potential of formative evaluation is unexploited. Student behavior that is a problem for teachers often includes verbal abuse, but student aggression manifesting in vandalism is also a major concern" (Szekszardi, 2006)

The above mentioned expansion also means a kind of expansion in non-expansion which means that an increasing number of applicants appear along the decreasing number of population (Nyerges, 2008)

It seems to be plausible, that no longer only the excellent high school students enroll in higher education but almost the whole of the concerned population. This means that those who were assessed in systematic pedagogical assessments (such as

PISA) also enroll, for example teacher education. As a result, even the teacher has lower reading, calculating or writing skills, not only their students. And while the teacher training hardly deals with such basic, school competences of the students, the members of the of PISA generation(s) enrolled in teacher training are on schools 'boards' already.

## Practical training

It has long been debated - particularly in the Euro-Atlantic countries - how long the practical training of student-teachers should last. The characteristics of this hands-on training, regardless of the experimental innovations and a few exceptions (alternative conceptions) theoretical training is carried out at the end of training period (at least in term of "putting in situation" of the trainees). The vast teaching attitude on impact: the student teacher would not give up the teaching profession right after the 'reality shock' has been experienced among school-pupils, which is a completely different picture than the trainee had been prepared for during the period of academic education and feels alone and without means to solve the problems – which, moreover, occur almost simultaneously. So – while several variants have been generated related to the length of time of practical education – the one of the most distinctive and neuralgic features of practical training on all variants have remained the same. This is particularly dangerous in the context in which competence is interpreted as the triad of *ability, knowledge* and *attitude* and the latter plays a crucial role in the development of teacher competencies and, consequently, both in forming it. Due to such an effort (e.g. prolonging practical training period) a so called undivided teacher training has started in September, 2013 (lasting five or six semesters depending on ISCED level of teaching), where the undergraduate candidates spend their last (final) semester of the training in practical schools. (Although the new training has started, still it is not stated that what is the content of this one-year-long-training period and what role the mentoring plays.)

## Possible solutions

One of the solutions to the listed problems could be the utilization of constructive learning methods (for example cooperative structures) and using diverse means of involvement of the participants. Involving students can be processed via cooperative structures (due to equal access; parallel interactions; encouraging/constructive /positive interdependence). In addition, structure of the cooperative learning can provide opportunities for meta-reflections on emotions and conducting students emotionally and to grow empathy as well as it can enhance the expected and important self-reflection. At the same time, it is crucial, for teacher educators mainly, the understanding of the importance of understandable explanation, the

transmission of knowledge, making curriculum understandable and realistic (practice-oriented) while involving students; to be acquainted with the *the learning habits of the students* and capability to accept it; the *development of personal, good contact*, knowing and utilizing the means of *effective communication* instead of manipulation, rigid patterns during the pedagogical activities; cooperation with colleagues ; to know the methodological means and diverse application of the teacher style; Teaching - support of learning on the base of such principles as effectiveness, productiveness and fairness.

An example for a learning process based on a constructive paradigm – 'putting students in situation'. Support learning by cooperative structures.

Generally, the primary aim of teacher training courses is diverse: on the one hand to complete a one-semester-long process; to study main learning, teaching theories, practices; reviewing the related special literature an expertise in it; and on the other hand to examine whether the students have acquired the content of the course and getting information about their competences (psychological, social, etc.) and last but not at least to reveal their attitude towards teacher profession, as they have several beliefs and naive views about it. A successful teacher training course's goal should be twofold: on one hand reaching academic aims and on the other hand moving forward competence objectives, as well. The following recommended structure is applicable both on hand for the control of acquiring the academic knowledge and on the other hand for the maintenance of the group-cohesion and control of it and for reflection on basic principles of cooperative learning. Meanwhile there is a possibility to involve also foreign students in case the course is held bilingually as to help an equal attitude.

After preparatory activities (e.g. instructions from trainer like: rules; moving regulations; providing the tasks for those who are not taking part in the process, actually) the forming of groups follows: (both homogenous or heterogeneous) groups can be formed in any way used in cooperative learning, depending on the goals of group-forming (for instance, the so called 'puzzle structure': the participants can find each other by looking for the pieces of a previously cut pictures. In case of using this structure the teacher doesn't have to know the participants, previously and is able to build heterogeneous groups).

## Promoting individual and community learning

Any structures used along with the cooperative learning, should be finished by giving chance to reflection. On one hand, reflections can give a stimulus for promoting competences and at the same way gives a chance for constructive criticism for participant, and on other hand involves all those participants who are not acting at the moment. Giving reflection provide *equal participation* for all: not only for actors but for audience as well. For this reason, participants should be

provided with foci of observation or an *observation sheet* (for example some should follow whether the principles of the cooperative learning were fulfilled; or other participant can observe the trainer's activities; idle participants; space or dynamics and so on). On the base of them they can react not only on work of the others but on the learning process, as well. During the 'controlled reflection' the *effective communication of* several critics, notes, questions and others (the option-based questioning; reaction on emotions not on persons). These cases are beneficial for trainers' meta-communication: one can suggest several models of (effective) communication. As an assessment of the process, reflections can follow: students (participants) can leave messages (questions, critical notes, remarks) to the trainer(s) which should be implemented in next processes or the trainer is expected to answer them in following session(s).

## Evaluation and assessment

The issues of a successful education (equity, effectiveness and productiveness) and feelings *about them* or *teaching them* are different entities. For example, a wide selection of (special) literature reviews the topic of societal equity and fairness and university lectures are held about it; many of us have read a lot, or almost everything about it. People, even students and teachers are convinced in their own equal attitude or even about that their family, school or country is not against the other people's social differences. But to know about it or live it are not the same things. This means that the a so called "equal" teaching or attitude should be independent from context and content. It means, that the learning processes themselves should be based on equality, *equity* and on *right to be different.* A basic dilemma in education related to the issue, is how to involve role players; how to implement the equal, effective and productive content into education, and let them find the way how their reflection can be developed. One of the answers could be the *cooperative learning* and the method of involvement of the participants can be processed via cooperative structures (due to equal access; parallel interactions; encouraging constructive/positive interdependence). In addition, structures of the cooperative learning can provide opportunities for meta-reflections on *emotions and conducting students emotionally* as to *grow empathy towards* a non-discriminative behavior whilst the behavior changes first and the attitude is being modified only after it.

## Another solution: Team teaching

A less applied method even in lower levels of institutional education is *team, co- or collaborative* teaching and is almost unknowable in frames of higher education as well as in teacher-education. Student-teachers are involved in teaching process by micro-teachings by 'team-teaching' which means that the students are working in pairs during the courses and are allowed to teach other students in the group. The

aim of the team teaching is to involve the would-be-teachers into the learning-teaching process not only by giving them a lecture about it or let them only heard or read about the effectiveness of the method. The aspects of the evaluation of the students' achievement are the basic principles of cooperative learning: equal access; parallel interactions; positive interdependence; application of flexible structures and considering individual needs. That means the for example the cooperative learning processes can be mixed with team teaching techniques as to have a more effective teaching method. At the same time, the students have to plan the lesson, tools, steps and tasks, estimate the possible products/achievements and keep time so the situation is alike the real classroom activities. The combined methods help the student-teachers to achieve a more effective knowledge in the field; to act in an emotionally richer learning environment; to avoid the probably under-motivated mood; let them observe and at the same time taking part in such methodology of organization of learning and let the students reflect on own learning and teaching and at the same time to reflect on it while observing the other teachers' activities during the practical training in practicing schools.

## Problems that team teaching can solve

It could be a revolving problem for both student-teachers and in-service pedagogues, as well to have the others and most of pupils taking part in the actions instead of not being idle while a task or a presentation is going on (to consider the principles of cooperative learning also in 'audience', too). Only some are able to pay enough and continuous attention to that fact that principle of equal access to the processes/(inter)actions is related to the 'audience', too; and the teachers' efficiency very much depends on that amount that how many students (pupils) have been 'left behind' which means that how effectively a teacher can involve not only the talented, active, motivated and excellent students/pupils, but the less-motivated, inactive or weak pupils/students, too. (This affects the principle of successful education, the equity, too.) The students can be given such aspects of observation for identifying the observed teachers' activities in the practical schools as 1) aims of the action(s), both academic and competence-ones; 2) the steps and 3) tasks and 4) tools related to them; 5) timing; 6) product/achievements and then the reflections in connection with these points of view. The principles of the cooperative learning also can be amongst the aspects of observation. Students often identify the sub/or non-cooperative learning-teaching processes as cooperative ones, however, the observed lesson(s) are an entirely frontally organized or project-based. The other weakness of the reports/observations can be the not so deep attitude to reflections – which means that both problems' solution depends on accurateness of instructions before starting the observation of 'real practice'. As the students are given well determined points of views they are able to form their opinion shortly but essentially. Supposedly, the

deeper involvement into cooperative learning can make the students more capable to produce an observation report of better quality, however, this coherency should undergo a more profound examination. A possible method of reflections can be a SWOT-like questionnaire like:

1. How the cooperative learning method could support own learning (teaching)?

2. What were the impressions about 'team-teaching' method?

3. What were the weakest features of the planning and realization of learning process?

4. What possibilities can be foreseen after such training related to the 'real practice'?

5. What are the advantages of the cooperative learning?

6. How the lecturer helped your participation and involvement in learning processes?

## Conclusions

It would be important to make the student-teachers able to reach professional means, methods and support in teacher training, which can ease for them and inspire them in carrying out a professional career in a creative way. These methods, suggestions could be applicable in teacher education primarily, especially in mental-professional preparation, to help the student-teachers in being self-reflective. Secondly, these considerations could be useful in post-graduate and in-service teacher training, where the routine can threaten the practitioners. The following possible tasks appear for the teacher training in the next areas:

1. There is a need for a more practice-oriented training of the would-be-teachers, as to not let them look at the teacher activity as a set of difficulties. Since self-reflectivity is expected, so the helping collaboration is unavoidable. This can be helpful in the practice-specified acquisition both of pedagogical knowledge and thinking.

2. The support of the in-service teachers: the changing of the contents of the postgraduate teacher training in direction where the creative task or problem-solving replaces routine.

An additional income of these considerations could be the opening new ways and renewal practice of changing teacher training by new contents and new structures:

Methods of becoming self-reflective;

Methods of sustaining the ability of being self-reflective (with monitoring, support along the career), so let the teacher training not end by graduating from the university but start;

The missing aspect of higher-educational didactic;

Establishing the possibilities for student-teachers to build a real (positive) self-concept.

**Table 1**.The former and recent requirements (competences and expectations) towards graduated teachers (abridged):

| 2006 | 2013 |
|---|---|
| 1. The competent teacher is qualified for developing the pupil's personality during teaching practice | 1. In field of development of students' personality and individual treatment (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 2. The competent teacher is qualified for forming, supporting and enhancing of learning groups and communities during the teaching practice | 2. In field of supporting learning groups, communities (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 3. The competent teacher is qualified for planning the pedagogical process, during the teaching process | 3. In the field of mastery in methodology and subject-matter (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 4. The competent teacher is qualified for developing pupils' literacy, skills and competences by application of the scientific knowledge, in teaching practice. | 4. In field of design of a pedagogical process (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 5. The competent teacher is qualified for effective development of competences grounding the lifelong learning, in own teaching practice | 5. In field of supporting, organizing and controlling of learning (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 6. The competent teacher is qualified for organizing and controlling the learning process, in own practice. | 6. In field of assessment of pedagogical processes and learners (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 7. The competent teacher is qualified for utilizing the various means of pedagogical assessment in own teaching practice | 7. In field of communication, professional cooperation and career-identity (Knowledge/Skills/Attitudes) |
| 8. The competent teacher is qualified for professional cooperation and communication, in own practice | 8. In field of autonomy and responsibility |
| 9. The competent teacher is qualified for professional commitment and self-cultivation, in own practice | |

Source:own figure

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