

## **ROLE OF STUDYING AT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF FORMING THE FUTURE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper describes partial results of the research implemented by the support of the SGS-2016-063 project – Studying at the Faculty of Education as a place for forming future teacher's professional identity. The study focuses on how the professional identity of future teachers is developed and what blocks this development. Identity is a psychosocial construct, it is the result of a dialectical relationship between an individual and society. It is created and changed by social relationships. Therefore, the research focuses on the course of study at the Faculty of Education in terms of interaction between students and university teachers. From a methodological point of view, this is a mixed research.

**Keywords:** Professional Identity, University teacher, Interaction, Attitudes, Values.,

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, the Czech educational system has gone through many transformations that presuppose a considerable modification of teachers' professional identity. "To be a teacher means, firstly, to be a personality. And strictly speaking this is something which cannot be trained or learnt. Only a person who educates oneself is not afraid to experience problems of human existence in its entirety, is able to study oneself and question their own abilities, and is able to become a trustworthy teacher." (Kořa in Vališová, Kasíková, 2007, p. 16).

Development of a teacher's personality is a complex and long-term process. Nelešovská (2005) divides socio-professional teacher training into three parts. Those are: theoretical, practical, and personality preparation. During the theoretical part a future teacher gains required knowledges; during the practical part a teacher obtains skills; and during the personality preparational dimension values are developed. Only their interconnection can develop a fully-fledged, professionally prepared teacher. Earlier, the process of becoming a teacher was considered as a relatively passive process, where the group uses increased pressure to form attitudes and behaviour of new members in order to adapt them to group norms (Juklová, 2009).

However, the prerequisites for quality output of the teaching profession are: harmonious synthesis of teacher's value orientation; professional education; pedagogical, didactics, and methodical skills, and last, but not least, personal traits and character traits of a teacher (Júva, 2011). Only this complex synthesis is an input condition to develop a new concept of teacher's professional identity.

### **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Social sciences use the term "identity" as an expression of authenticity, legitimacy, and a person's behaviour

towards other people (Bačová, 2003, p. 203). According to Jenkins (1996, p. 25) identity is a dialectical interplay of both processes of internal and external delimitation; therefore, identities are influenced by both internal and external powers. Identity is a psycho-social construct. It is a result of the relation between an individual and society, it is maintained, transformed, and rebuilt by social relationships (Berger and Luckmann, 1999). Social identity can be acquired on the basis of entering a certain identity, but it also can be attributed to another individual (Švaříček, 2007). The concept of a teacher's professional identity is generally based on the onion model which is divided into six layers: behaviour, competences, beliefs, identity, mission, and environment (Korthagen - Vasalos).

According to Spilková, professional identity consists of personal "pedagogical philosophy", self-image, self-esteem, self-efficacy, professional motivation, perception of requirements on teacher's profession, future perspective, and personal concept of the teaching process (Spilková, Vašutová, 2008).

Professional identity is dynamic. It is being transformed through time based on experience and it can be represented by critical features of a given profession. A student of pedagogy has a different professional identity than a starting teacher and more so than an experienced teacher (Průcha, 2002). According to studies of Beijaard (1995), at the beginning of a career, most teachers perceive their professional identity as very weak. After years of teaching, teachers tend to perceive their professional identity of being slightly negative. Samuel and Stephens (2000) have revealed the tension between teacher's wishes and ambitions and what the teacher is able to achieve in reality. There are many contradictory influences in the context of a transforming world. Perception of a teacher's identity depends on the idea they have concerning a professional community (Godson and Cole, 1994) and professional identity of teachers also reflects the environment that the individual adheres to. This also applies for the stage of non-graduate preparation for teaching.

During the development of professional identity, students of pedagogy ask themselves the following questions: Why do I want to be a teacher? What does it mean to be a good teacher? Will I be competent enough to contrive a quality teaching performance? Am I able to be a good teacher? What do I want to achieve as a teacher? What will the endeavouring goal be? Already in 1997, researches have confirmed that development of students' identities as starting teachers is influenced by direct experience (Mitchell, 1997).

Therefore, the focus of our study is the role of experiences during studies at a faculty of education in the process of development of a student's professional identity. "University professors who are preparing students of education have a strategic position in the process of professionalization. Their relationship towards this profession is essential since they provide their students with patterns of behaviour, attitudes and values, and influence students for their future profession" (Vašutová, 2004, p. 139).

### **3. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

The subject matter is the influence of studying at a faculty of education on the development of professional identity of future teachers. In correspondence with the concept of professional identity as a psycho-social construct, the research focuses on the influence of interaction of students and university professors during their studies at the faculty of education.

The aim was to attain: what idea do students create about performing a teaching profession, and to what extent are the experiences from studying at a faculty of education included in this idea.

The target group was represented by 130 students of Faculty of Education. Respondents of all teaching specializations at this faculty were included – 67 study a two-year graduate program for secondary education, in a full-time program, or in a distance program (teachers who are studying to gain supplemental qualification); 63 study a five-year graduate program for pre-primary, or primary education. The age dispersion of participants was from 20 to 28 years old.

Data collection was done by qualitative methodology; however, quantification was also used during the data procedures. The instruction for respondents was to complete an open-ended statement: "I, personally, would like to become a teacher, who is...".

A margin of a maximum of five statements has been set as part of the instruction in order to ensure a decision-making process. Furthermore, students were to comment on: "How did your encounters with university professors influence your decision-making process as future teachers?" Obtained data were first subjected to a content category analysis, followed by a quantitative summarization according to the occurrence frequency of connotations and a qualitative comparison of an experience input.

## 4. RESULTS

According to the unrestricted statements gathered from students, eight content categories in total have been generated: fundamental pedagogical philosophy, an attitude towards teaching profession, pupils' perception of a teacher, interaction with pupils; knowledges; didactic skills; communicative skills, and character traits.

- Fundamental pedagogical philosophy

Within this category students characterised a principle of understanding the role of a teacher. When respondents shared their opinions in this direction in essence this meant that they wanted to be a teacher who has an impact on pupil's complete personality, especially by creating adequate space. Examples: *"helps to orientate with the current world"*; *"space to express opinions"*; *"leads pupils to independent thinking"*; *"supportive in activities"*; *"develops individual skills of every pupil"*; *"develops moral values"*; *"helps to create a relation towards nature"*.

- Attitude towards the teaching profession

An attitude towards the teaching profession includes job satisfaction, aspects of job motivation, and meaningfulness. Examples: *"is satisfied in job"*; *"enjoys job"*; *"is enthusiastic"*; *"does not suffer from burn-out syndrome"*; *"perceives teaching profession as a mission"*.

- Perception of teacher's personality

Students expressed their wishes of how they want to behave as teachers and to be perceived by their pupils, parents, and colleagues. In general, this category comprises of aspects of authority. Examples: *"an example and model"*; *"has natural authority"*; *"is popular, fun"*; *"is not boring"*; *"is respected by parents and by colleagues from teaching staff"*.

- Knowledge, understanding

Evaluation of knowledge is orientated at areas of subject competencies of a teacher that are gained during studies at university and self-study. Examples: *"has quality professional education"*; *"adequately qualified"*; *"a professional in their study field"*; *"has general knowledge"*.

- Didactic skills

This category is related to the learning process and it characterises a teacher from the point of view of his didactic skills. Examples: *"uses modern teaching methods"*; *"creative teaching"*; *"implements games into teaching"*; *"teaches clearly, comprehensibly"*; *"is able to transfer the knowledge in an interesting way"*; *"is able to enthuse"*; *"is able to gain attention"*; *"is able to motivate pupils to be active"*.

- Interaction with pupils

The area of interaction with pupils contains both a general approach towards pupils and preferable interpersonal strategies as a teacher. Examples: *"considers pupils as partners"*; *"has a good relationship with pupils"*; *"has a humane approach"*; *"does not make differences between pupils"*; *"encourages pupils"*; *"listens"*; *"does not humiliate their pupils"*.

- Communicative skills and abilities

Those students who were orientated on communicative skills and abilities, during their statements, expressed opinions related to both general principals of how to treat other people and personal-disposal prerequisites of a teacher. Examples: *"has pleasant behaviour"*; *"is commonly assertive"*; *"is able to admit a mistake"*; *"is not afraid of group of people"*; *"is communicative"*; *"has a strong voice"*.

- Character traits

Many respondents expressed themselves in connection to character traits of a teacher. In general, students are aware of the importance of maturity: *"has a balanced value system"*. In relation to themselves it is important for students to have: *"adequate self-confidence of a teacher"*; in relation to other people: *"fairness"*; *"tolerance"*; *"thoughtfulness"*; *"friendliness"*; and *"helpfulness"* and in relation to the job: *"to be responsible"*; *"hard-working"*; and a *"precise"* teacher.

By summarizing the number of individual statements, we gain information about crucial characteristics that students would like to adopt: to be fair; to be empathetic; to be able to inspire pupils and motivate them to learn; to be a good didactic.

After comparing experiences of students, the result is that university professors at the faculty of education

enter the process of professional identity development of future teachers at the same level as teachers of lower educational levels, meaning primary and secondary schools. The idea about future performance of a teaching profession is derived from both, positive and negative experiences with teachers with whom students had met during the entire process of their education. Unfortunately, teachers at the Faculty of Education are not an exception, since students are experiencing both, the positive, and the negative examples of a teaching performance at this faculty.

#### Professor at the Faculty of Education as a positive factor in future teacher's professional identity development

- Professors at the FE are perceived by students as professionals in their field, still interested in their subject, they [students] would like to imitate them [professors]
- Students of FE do have encounters with fair professors, a trait that is both expected and valued, it is essential for professors to be able to act fairly.
- Thanks to the fact that students do meet professors who are capable didactics, they [students] wish to master the didactic aspect of their subjects as well.

#### Professor at the Faculty of Education as a negative example in future teacher's professional identity development

- With a decreasing motivation to learn due to the instructor, the desire to be able to motivate ones own future students increases.
- Respondents are inclined to becoming empathetic teachers as a result of inadequately fulfilled expectation of professors being unable to motivate students and admit personal mistakes.
- Since students insufficiently meet with inspiring and charismatic professors, they [students] intend to become such and would like to be a example to their own pupils.

## 5. CONCLUSION

During the studies at a faculty of education, students gradually clarify their fundamental pedagogical philosophy and their attitude towards the teaching profession. They formulate personal criteria of a quality performance of a teacher's role and realize what knowledge, abilities, and other personal traits are necessary for accomplishment. The most important indicators of a good teacher are, according to respondents: empathy, fairness, ability to improvise and motivate pupils, and excellent didactic skills.

During studies at a faculty of education, students meet with both, positive, and negative examples of a teaching profession. Positive examples are worth to be followed, negative examples arouse aversion, and students use them as points to avoid as teachers. According to our survey, respondents from the Faculty of Education have met with teachers whom they would like to follow in: interest in study field; fair and impartial behaviour; and level of didactic skills.

The negative experience gained from studying at the Faculty of Education has provided students with the desire to: be able to motivate their future students; become a more empathetic and charismatic teacher.

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