

**WORKSHOPS AS A SIGNIFICANT VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION COMPONENT OF STUDENTS
SPECIALIZING IN TEACHING FIELDS**

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ABSTRACT

The post modern social processes have somehow destroyed the institutional role of teachers over the past two decades. It is currently necessary to give would-be teachers new, different competencies than the present ones. The tendency to make the teacher education adequate for contemporary needs imposes a number of new tasks on the institutions of teacher education. There is, among other things, a need for organizing innovative classes in terms of both their content and form. The article will contain a practically verified concept of workshops as an important form of improving and completing the education of mathematics teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The post modern social processes and the withdrawal of Herbart's pedagogical concepts in favour of holistic pedagogy have significantly changed the perception of a teacher's role over the past two decades. It is currently necessary to give teachers new competencies other than the present ones. Their content of the competencies should not be highly specialized but joint, not closed but open, not reproductive but more creative. School teachers should tend to be guides and explainators rather than executors. There are ongoing discussions on the methods of teacher education and its desired effects in numerous countries. In 2002 the Ministers of Education of the European Union member states and the European Commission approved a 10-year program of education development whose first specific objectives among 3 strategic objectives is to improve the quality of educating teachers and in-service training for them. In 2005 the activities of a work-group constituted by the European committee were summarized. The work-group consisted of the representatives of 25 countries and developed a competency packet of a European teacher. The competencies were divided into the three

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following fields: learning organization, education the attitudes of school children and incorporating extra subject competencies to the teaching content of a specific subject.

Firstly, it is remarkable that the term “competencies” is often confused with a scope of the knowledge about any specific subject. Yet, the knowledge is merely one of the factors that determine the acquisition of certain competencies. It is highlighted by Weinert’s definition of competencies. He defined competencies as one’s cognitive skills and abilities to solve problems with the motivational and social readiness to use them in order to solve various problems in an effective and responsible way in ever changing situations. Secondly, the 21st-century schooling is not understood as as encyclopedic teaching, critical thinking, discussing and analysing but, above all, as acting. It can be expressed, in other words, as thinking for the sake of acting. Therefore, the tendency to adapt teacher education to contemporary needs results in numerous new tasks and changes in a number of teaching fields. The tasks are to be performed by the institutions of educating teachers and providing them in-service training. The education system favoured by high schools and universities is still based on conveying knowledge to students. Lectures and academic classes are at the core of the system. Such teaching methods do not support their students’ activities and make it difficult for them to obtain appropriate pedagogical competencies. There is an urgent need for organizing innovative classes in terms of their form and content.

2. WORKSHOPS AS AN INNOVATIVE APPRENTICESHIP FORM

The project “Practice makes perfect” was carried out at the Faculty of Mathematics and Information Science UAM from 2010 to 2013. The project was intended to develop a model of the teaching apprenticeship designed for the mathematics students who are prospective mathematics teachers. Workshops were an essential novelty in its program. The workshops were organized as several-day field classes. Most students had never known such form of classes before. The subject discussed in the workshops were divided into two groups:

(1) methodological problems concerning mathematics and information science and

(2) psychological and pedagogical problems. On one hand, the problems from the first group were determined by staff availability (both university employees and non-academic teachers). On the other hand, the problems were selected on the basis of the need of the participants to thoroughly explore certain topic areas. Both ways of selecting the topics can be considered as peculiar because of the participants’ own needs. Their contents were basically included in the curriculum of mathematics didactics. Thus,

it seems to be pointless to present the detailed program of the first group of problems in this article. Nevertheless, the psychological and pedagogical group of problems was innovative in terms of its form and the content of its component classes. Therefore, it will be discussed in more details.

The contents of the group were not related to teaching psychology which is typical of course lectures on psychology. This part of the workshops was devoted not to direct improving the teaching process but to developing the students' personalities.

The following problems were raised within the psychological–pedagogical workshops:

Training interpersonal skills.

Emotions in interpersonal relations.

Assertive techniques.

Time and teaching resources management.

Planning an educational work, working with a student group and its surroundings.

Reasons for choosing the job of a teacher.

Content-related and the teacher's psychological competencies.

Practical communication aspects and the development of the teacher's social competencies.

The problems of communication contexts. Utterance vs. Information. Received utterance. The problems of the multi-dimensionality of the utterance listening process.

The art of communicating.

The art of maintaining constructive relations in the education process.

Managing the communication process in the education process.

Management styles and school practice.

Conflict as a causality in the teacher's work.

Dyscalculia and its relations to mathematics teaching.

It is remarkable that every teacher should have the above competencies and they are independent on the characteristics of different subjects. The teacher ought to be able to develop their own personality as a structure of skills and values. They will allow them to find a solution to various pedagogical tasks and problems which are typical of their job. It is a truism to say that the teacher's job is particularly stressful and demanding. It is caused by its social mission and as a consequence, its responsibility and expectations related to its performance. The necessity to maintain a stable and difficult contact with other people is a challenge. In complicated interpersonal relations in schooling teachers quickly confront not only with certain limitations of the education system but also with their own confinements. To cope with the challenging tasks university students need to have

classes aimed at developing practical skills with an emphasis on psychosocial competencies. The latter ones are presently neglected in high school teaching. The students had an opportunity to assess the usefulness of the suggested workshops. These are the pieces of their opinions: The workshops played a crucial role in the project. Thanks to the chance to take part in the workshops we know much more than our co-students who did not take part in the project. We really learned a lot. It is impossible to express it briefly. We spent the entire days on the classes, conversations, learning activities, sharing our experiences at nights, solving problems in the passages, endless conversations or sincere dialogues with the school teachers. The psychological and pedagogical workshops allowed not only to get to know oneself better but to make us realize our role in the workshop community. It might help us settle in at school as a social group. The workshops had an impact on my idea of working as a teacher.

We are going there to start working hard. In this part of the project many topics were raised and precisely discussed. It seems to me we cannot do all these things in our regular classes during the academic year despite all the efforts of the university authorities. Despite the theoretical part I would draw your attention to the psychological and pedagogical classes which helped all the students get to know each other much better. We enriched our practical knowledge by sharing our experiences during the consecutive meetings. Beginning teachers gain such knowledge in the first few years of their work. We might discuss all the problems and think them over thanks to the complicated questions in workshop meetings... One might ask a question: Do students have identical chances in their standard curricula?

The workshop form was very interesting. We could learn a lot of new things which we had not known before. Personally, I got most useful information from the psychological classes. During the workshops we had a chance to all the didactic problems from the school teachers' point of view. We could learn how to cope with various situations.

3. CONCLUSION

The organization of classes as workshops is the only effective method to verify one's own relations with other people and to cope with their possible results. In turn, it is an appropriate point of departure to start searching for solutions to various problems during the workshops based on the knowledge, experience and support of other group members.

The students have often declarative knowledge about their social skills. The students happened to reveal impatience in the workshops when a topic previously discussed in psychology or pedagogy classes was raised. But if an instructor skipped "the theoretical preliminaries" and moved on to the

tasks on the practical use of the theory, it turned out very quickly that the students did not have such skills at all.

Before and after the workshop sessions the students underwent a survey research on their self-assessment of their psychosocial competencies necessary in the teacher's work. The survey included the questions about such competencies as: describing their pedagogical resources and personal advantages useful in the teacher's work, conscious creation of their image, recognizing and naming one's own emotions, communicative competencies, emphasizing in other people's problems, solving conflicts, collaborative skills, managing a group work, handling with one's tension, adapting to the changes in the surrounding. The comparison of the survey results before and after the workshop showed that students tended to overestimate their practical skills and confused them with the theoretical knowledge obtained at the university. The confrontation of the theory and the praxis raised the student participants' awareness of their lack of practical competencies. In extreme cases, some students were in the lower self-assessment. These students claimed that they learned much during the workshop. They admitted having overestimated their competencies and were not simple conscious of their practice knowledge shortage.

Despite the teaching aspect, the key role of the workshops is to integrate their participants. The talks during workshop sessions allow to get acquainted with their participants' needs and the possibilities to commence common actions by the school and university communities.

To sum up, the role of the workshops as part of the preparation process of pedagogy-oriented students to work at school is very valuable. The workshops are an essential completion of the process with an opportunity to confront the teaching theory with its practical aspects, particularly within the psychosocial competencies. Such elements were missing or included in the present university curricula to minor extent.

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