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Poland

The New Educational Review

Contemporary Concepts in Teachers Education in the Context of European Commission Standards

Abstract

In the article the authors intend to pinpoint a variety of notions of teachers professional education and growth. The abundance of ideas can be attributed to different social needs and expectations. Political, economic and cultural changes in Poland resulted in growing attention in the area of education and teachers' social role. The authors try to outline the latest tendencies in pedeutology, particularly concentrated on the models of teachers education.

Key words: *pedeutology, teachers education, competences, professional development*

Introduction

It is assumed that teachers play a crucial role in the knowledge-driven world. They can nurture the potential of children, so in fact influence the whole society and advance human generation. We are in the point of revising models of teachers education asking the question about standards which is in fact a question about the individual prerequisites that teachers must have to do their job successfully. We hope that well-prepared teachers will be the remedy for problems facing the educational system and the community. Although we are aware that the problem is complex, we tend to seek universal attempts, which turns out to be difficult because of a multiplicity of conditions underlying teachers' work. The problems can be reduced to demographic, economic, administrative and financial changes and obstacles.

In addressing these issues the authors are looking at a number of different but relevant concepts.

Scheme 1. Teachers education and its conditions.
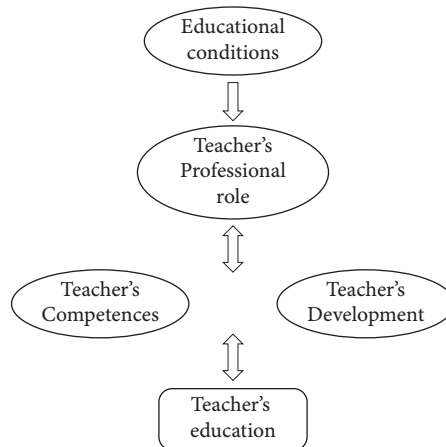
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It would be a truism to claim that the effectiveness of teachers' work is bound to their professional education. We seek the ways of professional preparation which could result in growing competences and professional fulfillment. The concepts establish a new perspective for teachers' professional role and responsibilities. The reality of teachers' work is very complex and diverse therefore there are the concepts.

Changes in teachers education lead to reconsideration of ever "valid" dilemmas. Some can be pointed out:

1. What roles should teachers be prepared for?
2. What competences do they need?
3. What should be the content of teachers education?

Contemporary teachers and their professional roles

Expectations towards teachers have been gradually growing and diversifying so they have become complex and have had a lot of facets. It is conditioned by outside and inside factors. By outside factors we mean ones connected with social and cultural changes. Respectively the second group are professional changes. Some factors can be asserted, for example educational policy, process of feminization in the teaching profession, job specialization, motivation and identification changes, the lack of correlation between preparation for the profession and improvement in it (Krajewska, 1995, p. 76).

Teachers' role is submitted to four traditional functions attributed to schools: teaching, education, socialization and care. Depending on the context of work: place, time, children and their needs, the importance of roles differs. From the above there stem some groups of duties: teacher as a leader of a teaching process, educator and carer, leader and organizer of children's permanent education, finally a person supplementing his/her education and pursuing self- perfection (Krajewska, 1995, p. 67).

So as to make education more adaptive and "close to life" teachers are supposed to help children to: create lifelong educational needs, develop creative attitudes to social roles and prepare for global and regional changes. Thus, teachers are expected to be:

1. researchers- reflective practitioners who do not only diagnose pupils and environment but also make some useful changes and conduct action research.
2. creators- using creative thinking and dealing with problems creatively.
3. animators of social environment- initiating cooperation between school and not only parents, but also local authorities.
4. ethicists- having an axiological attitude to education which is expressed by representing humanistic values and teaching them.
5. intellectuals- interpreting the world, people's behaviour, inquiring into and seeking for the answers to educational, social and cultural problems. In addition, they are expected to be open to political, social, scientific, and cultural progress.
6. guides and masters- helping pupils to find their particular way of development and growth by giving hints and advice and stimulating. Particular attention is paid to teachers as guides in the world of Information Technology.
7. " Europeans" – aware of different cultural values, stimulating cross-cultural attitudes without prejudice or nationalism. The role turns out to be more complex as we consider the necessity to support Polish and European identity simultaneously (cf. Koć-Seniuch, 2003; Krajewska, 1995).

We are in agreement that all the above roles are complementary and essential, nevertheless the discussion concerning what is crucial for being a teacher is not completed. Moreover, fulfilling these roles and expectations is quite often disturbed as there are no adequate conditions, for example, difficult material and social status, not to mention the low quality of professional preparation. Evolution in preparing teachers can be the key to progress. Consequently, to prepare teachers for these roles, the framework of their education has been sought for decades. This is the foundation upon which different concepts are based.

Main concepts in teachers education

The multiplicity of factors connected with the educational situation establish many perspectives in teachers education. On that basis, among others, three models can be defined (Kwiatkowska, 1988):

1. technological
2. humanistic
3. functional.

The most traditional one is the technological model which refers to behavioural psychology with its pragmatic approach. According to Kwiatkowska (1988) in the technological option teachers were trained not educated. Enthusiasts of this model underlined a parallel between the process of production and the teaching process. Teachers' preparation for work with children was limited to algorithms, schemes and controlling skills. The prominence was given to technological competences at the expense of humanistic ones. Consequently, in such an approach there was no place for creativity, innovation and reflections.

The second model, derived from humanistic psychology, assumed the main role of teachers' personality and knowledge. The representatives of this model elaborated a very important and strong link between personal growth, abilities and professional development. Furthermore, the main interest is shifted from the teacher to his/her professional education. According to Combs (1978, in: Kwiatkowska, 1988) the teaching profession is the most humanistic of all and demands special preparation. Self-confidence, self-fulfillment, creativity and professional identity are the main conditions and aims of this model. Teachers' personality is treated as a "tool" of an effective and satisfying educational relationship. Taking into consideration the above statements there is a necessity of special recruitment to the teaching profession, based on psychological analyses of personality. Moreover, the access to the profession would be limited only to a small, talented group of people. Summing up, the model appears to be idealistic and not practical.

The latest and most contemporary concept can be described as functional. Its roots can also be found in humanistic psychology. The crucial question is how to use theoretical knowledge in teachers' action to increase the effects of teaching. It is suggested that the more teachers know the more innovative, flexible and operative they become. The strategy of professional teachers education should also include creating conditions for building self-knowledge which leads to professional self-esteem. Moreover, this model emphasises the role of values and ascertains interpersonal relations on the basis of respect and dialogue in communication.

 The above models can be compared with a wider notion proposed by K. Duraj-Nowakowa (2000): conservative, liberal and radical. Taking into consideration the

main assumptions we can find similarities in the technological and conservative model; humanistic and liberal; functional and radical. The conservative assumption refers to the past rather than the future and is closely bound to tradition. The change aspects are omitted so the development is excluded from the education and teachers' work. On the contrary, the liberal concept opts mainly for the future development. Gifts, talents, potentials are considered. Furthermore, radicals condemn narrow specialization of teachers' work as it is an obstacle on the way to progress. They suggest that the impact should be put on social abilities, autonomy, self-reliance, responsibility and creativity, which could improve cooperation with pupils, parents and school environment. The concepts proposed by Hoyle and Elliot concerning teachers professionalism are coherent (cf. Gołębniak, 1998).

In the practice of teachers education since the political changes of the 90s, we have been able to observe a turn from an empirical attitude to a rather general one. It has an outcome in humanistic and axiological preparation for the profession and the stress is put on personal competences, instead of pragmatical ones (Kawiatkowska and Lewowicki, 1995). Nonetheless, due to our access to the EU, special attention is paid to practical but high-standard competences.

Concerning the strategies of teachers' professional education some ideas can be mentioned. If we assume that teachers' personality underlines effective teaching we concentrate on personality development in the process of professional preparation. Consequently, emphasis can be put on either general knowledge or problem solving or social-emotional competences.

Teachers' competences

Historically, the emphasis on what we seek in teachers swings between the practical and personal domains. The latest efforts to define what teachers need to be able to do tend to emphasize teachers' interpersonal and personal skills.

Research demonstrates that the affective competences of teachers directly impact students' learning. Educators along with reformators try to establish a catalogue of standards for teachers, which is in line with the general endeavours in Europe to increase the professionalism of teachers' work.

In legal requirements (The Lisbon Strategy, The Bologna Declaration) fundamental transformation of education and teacher training is agreed. This transformation could benefit not only educational systems but also the whole European society. In the Report "Education and Training" by the European Council and the European Commission, principles for teachers' competences and qualifications are set out. The roots of the thesis is an assumption that teachers play a crucial role in

educating young people and they can make the educational system evolve. It is important to notice that the EC recognize teachers as "key players" in the implementation of reforms in the knowledge-driven economy world. The text aims at proposing groups of the so-called "key competences".
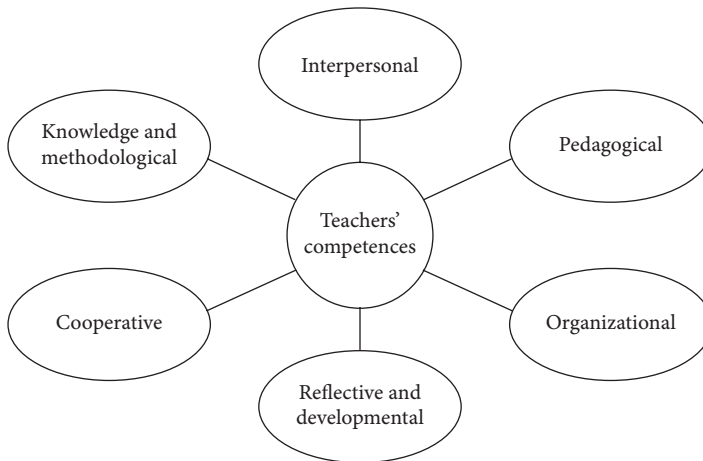
A lot of objectives are made to meet: high standard qualifications, preparation for lifelong learning and mobility and finally partnerships. The above should ensure that teachers will enhance the quality and efficiency of education. From the supposition we can derive three groups of crucial competences which teachers education should support. Teachers should be able to:

- work with others – they should have an ability to build interpersonal relations based on empathy, self-confidence and engagement. It is necessary to be aware of children's needs and human growth. This can help to increase social intelligence and collaboration with others.
- work with knowledge, technology and information – it is expected that they not only transfer knowledge but are equipped with abilities to construe it. It means to access, analyze, validate, reflect on and transmit. It is indispensable to create a learning environment supporting creativity and freedom of thought.
- work with and in society – teachers have always been perceived as contributors to the socialization process at all levels from local to global. Nowadays they should promote the role of active citizens. Teachers must be capable of creating cross-cultural respect and understanding. The task is challenging because teachers must balance between "different" and "common" values. Moreover, they should cooperate effectively with local communities and educational institutions so as to contribute to local and global environment.

The above-proposed competences are in congruence with pedagogical theories about teachers education. There is an accord that teachers should posses and use:

- Interpersonal competences- teachers should balance between leader and "fellow". This kind of competence helps them to create a friendly and cooperative atmosphere and encourage open communication. A competent teacher is prepared to distinguish and choose proper attitudes, for example:
1. guidance ⇔ counselling
    2. steering ⇔ following
    3. confrontation ⇔ reconciliation
    4. corrective measures ⇔ stimulation (cf. www.lerarenweb.nl.)
- Pedagogical competences- involving rules of pedagogical relation to provide a safe learning environment. They are drivers for the emotional, social, moral and intellectual development of pupils. Thanks to them children can become more independent, autonomic and full of initiative. It seems that such competences are mainly dependent on teachers' personality and their system of values.

Scheme 2. Teachers' competences.

Interpersonal

Pedagogical

Knowledge and methodological

Teachers' competences

Organizational

Cooperative

Reflective and developmental

Source: self created

- Knowledge and methodological competences- the core of these competences are abilities that enable gaining knowledge and experience, motivating pupils for their learning and working tasks so that they could accomplish successfully. Teachers should be equipped and focus more on equipping children with skills for life-long-learning — "learning how to learn", rather than proximate skills and knowledge which will become redundant.
- Organizational competences – help teacher to organize the didactic process, choose methods (eg. brainstorming, dramas, PBL) and forms (individual or group working) of teaching, using proper equipment (books, maps, multimedia, etc.) which help pupils to learn better.
- Cooperation competences with colleagues and school environment- due to them teachers make a contribution to the improvement of working conditions and effectiveness of school. They are a link to communication and interpersonal abilities.
- Reflection and development competences – similar to the concept of a "reflective practitioner" by Schon (1983). Reflection means reconsideration on doing and before/after doing. The teacher should be aware of underlying standards, educational values and views. These competences help to keep pace with changes in knowledge and professional practice and act accordingly. The teacher has a vision of his/her professional development, knows the weaknesses and strengths, and finally is capable of planning professional future (cf. Kwaśnica, 1993; Kwiatkowska, 1998).

These competences mirror the need for lifelong education, team work and cooperation with other subjects in education. It seems that teachers education should be based on these components as they underpin stakeholders' expectations.

Teachers' professional development

Paraphrasing Kozielecki's statement (1997, p.42) growth is an indispensable feature of a human being and motivators come from inside not outside. It means that teachers' development is rather conditioned by personality, experience and self-motivation. Less important, although not negligible, are conditions connected with organization, management, interpersonal relations in the work place and the legal, economic situation.

In addition, teachers' growth is a life-long and permanent process. Therefore, professional development involves personal engagement and changes (Kotusiewicz, 1997). Following Kwaśnica (1993, p.85) the main indicator of teachers' development is progress in competences and extending of their professional behaviour. Using a metaphor developing means becoming a teacher. The core changes lead to growing independence of the outside conditions and a more creative and reflective attitude towards duties and, of course, the self (Kwaśnica, 1995, s. 100). Beyond dispute, teachers education is bound to make them strive for perfection: prepare teachers for permanent development.

In compliance with the psychological concepts of human growth, professional development can be divided into some phases: "pre-conventional", "conventional" and "post-conventional" (Kwaśnica, 1995). In each of the phases the independence and competences are growing.

The "pre-conventional" phase is connected with starting professional work. Teachers mainly imitate patterns of behaviours, which are discerned as typical or even traditional. They most often tend to choose acknowledged behaviours which help them to gain approval of co-workers and pupils. Sometimes duties are not fully understood and accepted. The main factors of professional development are the outside conditions. Furthermore, other teachers are seen as models of a good teacher (Kwaśnica, 1995).

The "conventional" phase means full adaptation to the professional role. Teachers are aware of duties and expectations and act according to the "convention" of being a teacher. Teachers understand the patterns of teachers' behaviour, use knowledge and abilities effectively but not creatively and reflectively. To some extent teachers are able to implement changes in the aims, methods and means of pedagogical work but they are few and do not exceed the conventional role

(Kwaśnica, 1995). Teachers' abilities and inner motivation start to balance the outside influences. Teachers become more individual and express personal opinions and attitudes to their profession.

In the "post-conventional" phase teachers tend to do much more than what is described in the convention and become more creative. It shows in a more critical attitude towards knowledge along with emancipation from rules. They tend to create their own vision for being a teacher. Finally, teachers feel moral obligation and consequences of professional performance. The drive of changes is mainly needs for self-development and permanent growth.

The outcome of long and engaging development sometimes results in creating an autonomic attitude to work.

Conclusion

To sum up teachers can contribute to the welfare of societies, therefore they should be able to work with people, with and in society. In addition, teachers must be prepared for lifelong learning at European standards. Both Polish pedagogues and the European Commission articulate a dynamic vision of teachers education which allows teachers to work effectively and reflectively. The pattern of professional development for teachers has moved from the concern with training in techniques or present knowledge to a holistic view of early professional development and preparing for career planning. This creates both a drive for curricular change and opportunities for its implementation.

The pressing case is to incorporate the claimed skills to teachers education but the above appreciation of necessity to improve teachers education is rarely forwarded by practice. The case of teachers is not the hot topic in politics. From time to time the problem appears in the context of political changes, educational reforms and especially when the media spectacularly publicize pedagogical difficulties.

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