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European Trends and the Slovak Approach to Teacher Competences and Capabilities

Abstract

A number of authors have looked into the problems involved in finding the most appropriate and fundamental competences and capabilities of a teacher that form the basis of his/her professionalism and are becoming more and more essential for changing attitudes towards requirements in the professional preparation and practice of a teacher. This trend has become evident since the 1990s with several overriding tendencies which can be easily identified. F. Oser's model, which has been widely recognized across Europe, has been the main inspiration for the preparation of the Slovak approach towards teacher competences. The draft of the structure of a teacher competence profile in the Slovak Republic in accordance with European trends and documents is based on the teacher's competence profile from the interactional model of education with the following three basic dimensions: the pupil, the teacher, and the teaching process which occurs between them. This is the basis for the teacher's competence profile and it has now become a topic of public debate.

Key words: *fundamental competences and capabilities of a teacher, teacher professionalism, professional preparation, European and Slovak approach to the competences, teacher's competence profile, interactional model for the teaching profession, pedeutology*

Introduction

In the modern history of the development of the teaching profession different authors have dealt with the problem of looking for the most suitable and funda-

mental competences and capabilities of a teacher that should form the basis of his/her professionalism and become an incentive towards necessary changes in teachers' professional preparation and practice. This trend has become evident since the 1990s within the central European context. It is possible to identify several dominant tendencies on which the structure and priorities in defining teachers' competences is based.

1. The dimension of initial preparation, its content and the formulation of the profile of a graduate
2. The dimension of the specific context of educational situations
3. The dimension of the teacher as an autonomous subject i.e. his/her personal orientation in terms of dynamics (both the teacher's and the pupils' development)
4. The dimension of the requirements of society in transition from the point of view of the family, the region, state, Europe or the international community that is reflected in a person's key competences.

These aspects are gradually asserting themselves and are interlinked, with a tendency for the third and fourth aspects to dominate.

The first dimension is characteristic of the beginning of the 1990s. Then the tendency was for the problem of a teacher's competences and skills to be solved by pedagogical theorists, mainly university lecturers involved in the preparation of future teachers. The content of the required changes is focused on initial preparation and reforms in teachers' preparation. A teacher's competences and skills are defined in relation to the content of initial teacher training i.e. the choice of priorities in initial teacher preparation. In this trend **normative models** are usually favoured, defining what a graduate should be capable of at the moment of completing his/her initial teacher preparation i.e. what he/she is capable of doing (rather than what his/her professional competences should be). A classic example (still surviving today) are approaches to defining competences that copy the teacher's initial preparation within the existing framework:

- The subject matter of the preparation (the graduate's competence)
- Pedagogical and psychological aspects of the preparation (the graduate's competence)
- Methodological i.e. the subject specific didactic aspect of preparation (the graduate's competence)

The Latest Views of Teachers' Competences

The 1990s is a period of transition towards a modern understanding (although still academic) with a tendency to accept requirements focused on teachers' skills

for self-development, with different categorizations of these requirements based on different criteria by different authors e.g. according to the description of activities, the enumeration of responsibilities, the description of performance i.e. the qualities and personality type and so on. There is a tendency to abandon the normative approach which is defined in the profile of an ideal graduate. This approach has become the subject of criticism. On the other hand real skills which are individualized and refer to specific teaching situations have been defined. A dynamic approach is becoming more important and reflects a gradual drawing nearer to the required parameters of the teaching profession with the emphasis on the skill to reflect on one's work which is a professional's aptitude to accept change and adapt to it.

Kyriacou (1991, Czech translation 1996, p. 23) categorizes pedagogical skills according to a teacher's activities that contribute to the successful teaching process. Its starting point is the achievement of didactic aims, its criterion is effective teaching which is a necessary pedagogical skill. It emphasizes the need to deepen the ways of thinking and decision-making and at the same time practical skills for fulfilling one's aims and decisions. It concerns the following skills:

1. *Planning and preparation*: skills that contribute to the choice of didactic aims, the required skills that a pupil is supposed to master by the end of the lesson and also skills to choose the best possible means to achieve these aims.
2. *The realization of a unit of work or lesson*: these are skills necessary for the successful involvement of pupils in the learning process.
3. *The management of a unit of teaching*: skills necessary for the management and organization of teaching activities that support a pupil's attention, interest and involvement.
4. *The atmosphere in the classroom*: skills necessary for the creation and maintenance of pupils' positive attitudes towards teaching and their long-term motivation.
5. *Discipline*: skills necessary for maintaining discipline and solving occurrences of disruptive behaviour.
6. *The assessment of pupils' knowledge*: skills necessary for assessing pupils' results that are applied in formative assessment and summative assessment.
7. *The teacher's reflection and self-evaluation*: skills necessary for the evaluation of one's own work with a view to improving it.

Similarly the concept of a teacher's skills is based on a teacher's roles in the western European context. From them the Dutch authors (Vonk et al. 1992) derive the areas of teachers' responsibilities in educational processes:

- *Knowledge and understanding* – knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge of the primary school curriculum, knowledge of children's and young people's

stages of development, knowledge of learning processes, knowledge of educational principles, the teacher's roles and so on.

- *Planning and preparation of the global and specific educational activities* – starting from planning a unit of work, didactic strategies in the classroom to long-term planning of the work in the classroom including long-term plans.
- *Teaching strategies and methods of effective learning* so that a teacher can have an idea of a pupil's cognitive skills and educational processes including a teacher's communicative skills.
- *Classroom management* – management and organization of education situations including a supportive learning atmosphere in the classroom, ensuring discipline and the enforcement of school rules and so on.
- *Assessment of a pupil's learning activities* – results, progress in learning and development
- *A teacher's further professional development* – self-reflection and openness, including one's own professional aims.

The orientation of the two above-mentioned approaches is getting closer to skills which take into account the teaching process while the focus on the pupil and the teacher's lifelong development is less important. These approaches as well as similar approaches have influenced Czech pedeutology, in which it is possible to identify the efforts to find ways between the classic division according to the areas of initial preparation and the new view of skills according to the areas of a teacher's performance.

According to Helus (1995) a fully-completed study should be reflected in certain competences. While the first three are derived from the areas of preparation, the remaining ones focus more on a teacher's activities during the educational process. They are:

- Subject specific – i.e. competences concerning the scientific basis of the subjects taught
- *Psychological* – i.e. competences in differentiating pupils and students with regard to their age and individual differences, opportunities for development and barriers, building relationships, attitudes and values and so on.
- *Pedagogical-didactic* – competences in organizing the procedure through teaching material so that the teaching material turns into information and supports the ability of the individual to think about the subject and to formulate his/her own views, to discuss and to further orientate him/herself independently and so on
- *Communicative* – the so-called competences in building relationships and a partnership between the teacher and his/her pupils and between the pupils themselves, in building an atmosphere of team-spirit, developing the basis of civic society and so on.

- *Management (pedagogical-management)* the so-called competences to make use of the educational opportunities of the area and putting into practice the interests of the school (the class, the pupils) within the local area, to help pupils understand the world around them and apply this knowledge within the classroom context.
- *Advisory and counseling* – mainly in relation to parents, especially if a teacher recognizes a pupil's typical features (talents, challenges) with regard to different aspects of their individuality.
- *Planning and strategies* – for educational work with pupils and students, to participate in the creation of the school's programmes, to be able to explain them to the public and support them.

Towards the end of the 1990s the Czech authors tended to formulate a teacher's competences on the basis of personal orientation. According to Švec (1998) they are as follows:

- *Teaching and education competences* – psycho-pedagogical, diagnostic, communicative competence.
- *Personal competences* – the ability to accept oneself, pupils and colleagues, the ability to be assertive, authentic and empathetic.
- *Development competences* – to adapt, to research, to find information, to reflect on one's own work, self-regulation

Spilková (1999, pg 41) suggests a term competence preparation of teachers' which according to her is a framework of six key competences that are part of a wider teacher's professionalism:

- *Psycho-didactic*
- *Communicative*
- *Organisation and management*
- *Diagnostic and interventional*
- *Advisory and counselling (in relation to pupils' parents)*
- *Self-reflective*

By employing these 'The emphasis is shifted from the theoretical basis of the subject to psycho-didactic education and the overall refinement of the teacher.' Splikova regards the teacher's activities as a complicated, variable and creative process of personal encounters between a teacher and a pupil through the education content. There are numerous unknown, unexpected risk factors and a teacher should be an expert in managing the teaching process and refining personality. Therefore the main aim of initial teacher preparation is to 'equip the teacher with key professional competences that are understood as complex psychodidactic skills enabling the teacher to handle complicated and changing pedagogical situations.' (Splikova, 2004, p. 25,)

Contemporary European Trends

The contemporary understanding of the matter of teachers' competences accentuates both the teacher's point of view as an autonomous subject and the point of view of the requirements of a society in transition, that are defined mainly on the part of the international community in accordance with a new social paradigm based on knowledge (a learning society). Not only are these two points of view the basis of international documents and agreements concerning a teacher's competence profile, but also of their application to the conditions of particular European countries. These points of view are becoming more and more oriented on the key competences needed for the 21st century, and an important phenomenon is the participation not only of academics, but also of experts in different areas (mainly from schools, but not exclusively) and of parents and the public at large.

The efforts of the internal group of experts of the **European Commission** in 2002 resulted in the identification of professional teachers' competences in the region of Europe. It is a synthesis of key conditions, contexts and structure of teachers' competences in many countries of the EU. It puts emphasis on the paradigm of a learning society, the need for social cohesion of society through education, the role of universities in the preparation of teachers, the growing autonomy of schools, the increasing importance of social and cultural competences, the changing role of a teacher within society, the necessity of tools for evaluating a teacher's performance and so on. The main focus is on the personality of the pupil. It divides a teacher's competences into two big groups (based on the European Commission, 2002).

1. *Competences concerning the process of learning include:*
 - The characteristics of the pupil on admission (knowledge and understanding of their social, ethnic and cultural differences, the range of which requires the individualization of learning opportunities, the adaptation of education to pupils, the differentiation of teaching, education in other languages)
 - The changing teaching conditions (the changing role of a teacher in the teaching process and within the school, the emphasis on facilitation and responsibility, the acknowledgement of real-life learning, the participation in research and in one's own professional development via life-long education)
2. *Competences referring to learning outcomes* stem mainly from international agreements concerning key competences for the 21st century. As these competences should be characteristic of every person in the future, they are crucial for those whose profession is that of a teacher.

- Competences for citizenship, European identity and sustainable development
- Competences for a learning society (the importance of lifelong learning, to be able to learn how to learn, digital literacy, creativity and innovation, the ability to solve problems, communication and cooperation)
- Competences for integrating ICT in education
- Competences in teamwork
- Competences in participation in the creation of the school curriculum and assessment
- Competences in cooperation with parents and social partners

One example of the national application of the above-mentioned European trends is the **Scottish programme ‘The Qualified Teacher’** brought into effect in 2001 (according to Vasutova, 2004) according to which a fully-qualified professional teacher is a teacher who *is ready to participate in improving the teaching process and his/her professional self-development*. This requires four areas of professional competences which are further broken down to the level of indicators. They are:

1. *Professional values and duties*

- Effective quality learning in the classroom (to ensure a pupil’s progress in learning and his/her development, to create a positive atmosphere for learning, to employ strategies to support learning)
- Critical self-reflection, self-evaluation and development of a teacher (to evaluate the teaching process and to critically reflect upon it, to improve one’s professional performance, to be involved in the system of further education, and to use in one’s work the results of research)
- Cooperation and influencing (colleagues in professional development, partnership, mutual counselling, participation in building the culture of the school)
- Educational and social values (a sense of truth, responsibility, fairness, the equality of pupils and the relevance of education to wider social values and the aims of the school, the individual development of pupils)

2. *Professional knowledge and understanding* – critical understanding of educational processes, its social and cultural context and all areas of key competences for the 21st century.

3. *Professional and personal attributes* (such as enthusiasm, empathy, effective communication, openness, creativity and organizational skills, interest and so on)

4. *Professional action* – professional duties, knowledge and personal attributes in their mutual interaction should be explicitly reflected in professional behaviour

In the **Czech Republic** these international trends have influenced the efforts to create a compulsory national document on a teacher's professional competences which are mainly represented in the works of J. Vasutova (2000, 2001, 2004). Vasutova builds on the report from the European Commission 'Education for the 21st Century' in which Delors (1997) defines four key educational aims of a learning society. These are reflected in new functions of the school and represent the basis of the structure of a teacher's professional competences. He has the following educational aims, functions of the school and teachers' competences in mind:

1. *To learn to know* (the qualification function of the school) which is made up of these competences:
 - Subject
 - Didactic and psycho-didactic
 - Pedagogic
 - ICT and information
 - Management
 - Diagnostic and assessment
2. *To learn to live together* (the social function of the school) is made up of the competences:
 - Social
 - Pro-social
 - Communicative
 - Intervention
3. *To learn to do* (the integrative function of the school) is made up of the competences:
 - Cultivation of the individual
 - Multicultural
 - Environmental
 - Pro-European
4. *To learn to be* (the personalization function of the school) is made up of the competences:
 - Diagnostic
 - Evaluative (self-evaluation)
 - Healthy life-style
 - Advisory-counselling

Besides the professional competences common to all categories of teacher, there are also personal competences which include psychological resilience and physical fitness, empathy and tolerance, attitudes and moral standards, personal skills and qualities. (Šimoník, Havel 2006)

Although within the central European context this is the best justified and

thought-out model, it is an example that combines the application of European starting points and traditional approaches to initial preparation, with more ambiguous and repeated terms which define the competences as well as personal qualities and moral values.

The inspiration for preparing the Slovak approach to a teacher's competences has been the F. Oser's model (2001) recognized in Europe, which sub-divides the standards for teachers into five groups of competences orientated on:

- *Oneself as a teacher*
- *The school* – the cooperation within school and with the public
- *The individual pupil* – the relationship between teacher and pupil, the diagnosis of the child and interventions derived from this, supporting learning strategies, and assessment
- *Pupils as a group* – solving discipline problems and supporting social behaviour in pupils
- *Teaching strategies* – oriented on management and organization of the education process, the use of the media and general didactic and subject-didactic skills

A Proposal for the Structure of a Teacher's Competence Profile in the Slovak Republic

In accordance with European trends and documents, the Slovak expert community is confronted with the creation of a national competence profile for a teacher and working it out regarding professional standards for different categories of pedagogical employees, key competences and skills as well as quality indicators.

With regard to comparison, synthesis and criticism of certain existing models of professional competences, it seems appropriate to base the teacher's competence profile on the **interactive model of education** consisting of three principle dimensions represented by: the pupil, the teacher, the educational process going on between them. The proposal of the teacher's competence profile is derived from it and it is a supporting structure for the creation of professional standards of particular categories of pedagogical employees (e.g. a primary school teacher, a teacher at lower secondary level, carer)

While creating a competence profile the following basic conceptual starting points have been respected:

- The priority of a **teacher's personal development** oriented on the holistic development of a pupil in the educational process, which is understood as

a personal interaction between the teacher and the pupil through the content of the education, facilitating learning in variable pedagogic situations.

- European trends and documents defining the requirements needed to set up a learning society and the **key competences of an individual in the 21st century** as well as international documents concerning the teacher's profession and life-long learning
- A clear division of the **dimensions of a teacher's personality** into professional (i.e. qualifications), ethical (i.e. morality) and personal (i.e. personal maturity), while the issue of the competence profile and professional standards are the matter of a purely professional dimension. Although the ethical and personal dimensions are crucial for the teaching profession, the requirements concerning a teacher's personal and ethical qualities cannot be confused with his/her professional competences and skills.

The advantages of the suggested three dimensional model are:

- Simplicity and clarity to professional pedagogues and the teaching public
- Clarity of terminology, as well as clarity of particular competences
- The possibility of setting all professional activities and skills within the wider context of competences (without confusing them with personal qualities)
- The suitability of the competence model for the preparation of programmes of teachers' initial and post-graduate education, mainly for defining a graduate profile for particular categories of pedagogical employees, as well as that of particular career levels starting from a novice teacher to an expert teacher
- The possibility of reflecting them in visible indicators i.e. demonstrable knowledge, skills, attitudes that are shown in one's performance or behaviour

It is helpful to divide the required competences of a teacher into three broadly defined groups (dimensions):

1. *Competences oriented on the pupil*, his or her initial characteristics and the conditions of development
2. *Competences oriented on the educational process* can be further sub-divided into:
 - Competences for the mediation of the content of education, its didactic transformation according to educational needs and the pupils' learning (content and interactions)
 - Competences for the creation of the education process
 - Competences for influencing the personal development of pupils
3. *Competences oriented on the teacher's self-development*

The competence profile of every pedagogical employee is made up of the following key and specific competences (that must be further developed into profes-

sional standards for each category and each career level and provided with indicators i.e. visible knowledge, skills and attitudes):

1. The Pupil Dimension

- *To identify developmental and individual characteristics of the pupil* – to recognize, diagnose and accept individual specific characteristics of a pupil (talent, difficulties, qualities)
- *To identify psychological and social factors which have an impact on the pupil's learning* – to know learning theories, diagnose and accept individual learning styles according to psychological, physical and social conditions
- *To identify the socio-cultural context of the pupil's development* – to recognize, diagnose and accept the socio-cultural (or multicultural) background of the pupil, his/her family.

2. The Educational Process Dimension

The mediation of the educational process

- *To have mastery of the subject taught*
- *To have the ability to plan and prepare the educational process* – to be able to create and realize medium-term and short-term educational plans, projects, situations within the context of the school programme and the pupils' individual needs.
- *To have the ability to formulate the learning objectives oriented on the pupil* – to know the syllabus and to focus on the learning needs of the pupil
- *To have the ability to make a psycho-didactic analysis of the subject matter* – to know and be able to carry out a didactic analysis of the subject matter, choose key subject matter and subject matter for extra development within the context of the educational objectives and the pupils' learning needs
- *To be able to choose and use teaching forms and methods* – to know and efficiently use methods and forms supporting the pupils' active learning
- *To be able to evaluate the process and outcomes of the educational process and of the pupils' learning* – to know the forms of assessment, to be able to set up criteria and assess pupils with regard to their individual differences

Creating the conditions for education

- *To create a positive atmosphere in the classroom* - to be able to effectively communicate with a pupil and his/her closest environment and to create an environment best able to enhance his/her development (discipline, conflict resolution, facilitating relationships, authority)
- *To create and use material and technological equipment in education* – to create and use teaching aids, media, ICT in the educational process

Influencing the personal development of the pupil

- *To be able to influence the personal development of the pupil* – to know, apply strategies for the personal development of the pupil (self-understanding, self-confidence, self-regulation), to appreciate the pupil's personal skills
- *To be able to develop the pupil's social skills and attitudes* – to know, apply strategies for the personal development of the pupil (empathy, pro-social behaviour), to appreciate the pupil's social skills
- *To be able to prevent and rectify social, pathological occurrences and disruptive behaviour* – to recognize them, to collaborate with an expert, to appreciate positive models

The Dimension of the Teacher's Self-Development

- *To be able to grow professionally and develop* – to reflect, diagnose, assess one's own teaching performance, plan one's own growth and education, have a general, cultural and a citizen's overview (the country, Europe), to be aware of trends in development in society and in education, to be able to carry out one's own research
- *To identify with one's own professional role and with the school* – to identify with the role of facilitator, to know the aims of the school's development, to act as a representative of one's profession, to effectively communicate with social partners

Conclusion

Designing the competence profile in the Slovak Republic relies on implementing general European and global trends in education. In the future the transformation of the curriculum is likely to occur as it has in the Czech Republic, as well as the creation of school development programmes and a more urgent need for individualized education. On the one hand, it will bring about greater autonomy for teachers to make decisions, on the other hand, the teacher's responsibility for the process of education will also increase. These changes will provide teachers with a greater degree of autonomy, however there will also be requirements for a higher degree of professionalism which is reflected in professional standards. Professional standards should therefore include such requirements that would encourage the teacher to prepare themselves for these changes during their initial and post-graduate training so that they are able to act professionally in the face of these new demands and so that their professionalism can be evaluated.

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