

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEDAGOGICAL INTERNSHIPS IN THE PROCESS OF PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE TEACHER'S PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

Educating children, youth and, later in life, adults has always been a fundamental duty of every society. The current transformations taking place in the social life and the educational reforms in Poland necessitate due reflection upon a new model of educating future teachers. Their education based on the designs and curricula of university studies comprises both theoretical and practical classes. Theory and practice are interwoven into a coherent entity and constitute a source of knowledge legitimized in the process of teachers' education. The research object of this study is the education of pedagogy students with particular focus on the significance of pedagogical internships in the preparation for the teaching career.

The text is divided into several sections. The first is devoted to the role of pedagogical internships in preparing future teachers for performing their profession as well as to the platforms of teachers' pedagogical activity. The next part comprises a presentation of a fragment of authors' own (cyclic) research conducted among students of teaching courses. The article is complemented by conclusions.

Keywords: *pedagogical internships; upper education; teacher's profession.*

INTRODUCTION

The teacher's profession is one of the oldest in the world. Educating children, youth and, later in life, adults have always been treated as a fundamental duty of every society. Along with the development of societies and the pedagogical thought, which in turn has brought about changes in the concept of teaching, the expectations from teachers have been changing and, in consequence, teachers' preparation for professional work. Despite these changes, teachers' competences, professionalism and personality, examining them, and creating a personality model of a person who directly shapes the morality of the young have been the issues of crucial significance in all historical periods. In the 19th century, traditional school wanted teachers to equip their learners with memory-based knowledge, mechanic application of rules and algorithms, the ability to reproduce facts and definitions from the memory. This way of teaching largely prevailed also in the 20th century, although in the time of progressivism the need was proclaimed for learners' spontaneous undertakings – the analogous activity to the research process. Learners were to investigate what seemed interesting to them, what they wanted

to recognize – therefore, the teacher's role was to become close to the role of an observer. The second half of the 20th century was the time when the unity of the process of teaching and learning was clearly emphasized (Sivek H., 2009).

Contemporary transformations taking place in social life and educational reforms in Poland make it indispensable to think deeply of a new model of educating future teachers. What should the teacher focus on today is not knowledge itself but, first of all, the learner as a person equipped with the mind and free will and ready to undertake dialogue with the teacher. It becomes obvious that to fulfill the child's multisided developmental needs, the teacher should be prepared for this both theoretically and practically, must be able to initiate and act creatively, must successfully handle many pedagogical tasks, among which some new, unpredicted and unspecified problems often appear. Teachers are expected to be competent, creative, self-controlled, disciplined and responsible for their work. Thus, various competences and qualifications are required from them.

Therefore, particular significance is attributed to the process of pedagogical education of candidates for teachers. Pedagogical universities are faced with the important task and duty to prepare their students for fulfilling the teacher's role in the future. The education of future educators, based on the designs and curricula of university studies, comprises both theoretical and practical classes. Theory and practice are interwoven into a coherent entity and constitute a source of knowledge legitimized in the process of teachers' education. Many positive qualities and obligations can be implanted into a future teacher during university studies, particularly by pedagogical internships. They are an integral part of the education of students – the candidates for teachers in care and educational institutions of various types (Mazhets H., 2001: p. 83). Practical education of pedagogy students is a complex and difficult process of acquiring by future teachers pedagogical skills and other predispositions necessary to guide the process of the child's development in different care and educational institutions. This acquisition occurs through planned, conscious and reflective experience (Mazhets H., 2001: p. 83).

The text is divided into several sections. The first is devoted to the role of pedagogical internships in preparing future teachers for performing their profession as well as to the platforms of teachers' pedagogical activity. The next part is a presentation of a fragment of authors' own (cyclic) research conducted among students of teaching courses. The article is complemented by conclusions.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEDAGOGICAL INTERNSHIPS IN CONSTRUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOP OF FUTURE TEACHERS – THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preparing students for their future professional work should comprise both broadening theoretical knowledge and improving the practical workshop. What is of essential significance for candidates for teachers are various forms of internships which they fulfill during university studies. Regardless its type, pedagogical internship cannot constitute an isolated element of the curriculum but must be treated as a factor which connects all outer influences on students and their own efforts aimed at full preparation for the teacher's role.

Internships have their clearly specified place in the process of socializing the young, understanding educational phenomena and shaping students' theory-based skills of conducting pedagogical activities. In compliance with the curriculum of

pedagogical internships, three directions of students' activity are distinguished: the cognitive, instrumental and verifying one. Future teachers familiarize with the functioning of the educational system in Poland, they analyze the work of school or care and educational institutions as well as the situations associated with children's life in various environments and their psychophysical development. Apart from their cognitive aspects, internships enable the verification of the acquired pedagogical, psychological, sociological theories, identifying and solving problems, as well as conducting empirical studies which prepare for scientific research. In this way, internships play many (cognitive, educational, research, innovative, creative, etc.) functions in the process of educating future teachers.

These functions show that pedagogical internships shape students' creative attitude, reveal the predispositions to perform the profession well, develop reasoning, imagination and pedagogical intuition. This is possible because internships allow students to familiarize with the whole activity of educational institutions. They also enhance shaping attitudes and skills, responsibility, interpersonal contacts in collaboration with a group of learners as well as enable diagnosing didactic and educational situations in a particular educational environment. Moreover, internships help the participants in applying their theoretical pedagogical knowledge in care and educational activities and they stimulate the process of students' socialization and their identification with the future career (Brycka E., Lusina M., Wyzhga O., 2016).

Meeting children and youth at school, in selected classes, allows for getting acquainted with the school reality. Over the last years, this reality has been subjected to substantial transformations, which makes (not only) young teachers face some particular challenges. They have to solve many problems resulting from social, cultural and economic transformations, from changing educational needs and people themselves, from the need to deal with the phenomena of simultaneous and lifelong education. The observation and analysis of the whole wealth of contents introduced by every lesson and, first of all, the chance to test one's skills are unquestioned assets of each internship. The time of internship also offers a possibility of reflection: "Do I surely want to be a teacher?" (Chollek K., 2001) and "What kind of teacher do I want to be?" In search for answers to these questions, the role of guides and a kind of "the masters of the teaching art" is played by supervisors of pedagogical internships – both on the part of the university and on the part of the institutions in which students implement them. Therefore, the acquired competences should be taken into account in selecting the people for these functions.

Undertaking the issues of professional competences of educators involves distinguishing three platforms of didactic activities within which teachers' pedagogical activity takes place. The first comprises the recognition, explanation, and interpretation of the didactic facts and phenomena associated with the learner's situation at school and relations with classmates, the effects of didactic influence and their determinants, the signs of changes in learners' functioning at school, the changes in their life attitudes and the system of values. A teacher should be able to see things as an "outer" observer (who analyses phenomena, generalizes the collected experiences, applies didactic knowledge in explaining these phenomena) and an observer "equal" to learners (who can feel their mental states, tries to understand their point of view and their way of valuing the reality).

The second platform is related to the sphere of methodological activity. It comprises both the elements of "didactic technique" (formulating the

goals, selection of contents, methods, forms, means and the evaluation of goal implementation) and the elements of interpersonal contacts and humanistic attitudes, mostly associated with respecting learners' subjectivity, the teacher-learner partnership, didactic dialogue, experiencing values together, emotional harmony, and co-responsibility of teachers and learners for the course and effects of didactic work.

The third platform comprises teachers' creative, innovative attitudes. The autonomy of school and teachers, as well as the lack of strict content, methodological and organizational rigors in modern school give teachers some space for unorthodox, innovative activities, for shaping their professional personality by unconventional acts within both the "technological" organization of the teaching process and the "humanistic" organization of the students' environment – actual and emotional experiencing the moral, aesthetic and cognitive values together with learners (Palka St., 1998).

Taking these platforms into consideration, it should be highlighted that the teacher's work today has to refer both to the existing reality of social life and to the future reality. At the same time, the awareness should be raised that there is no future without the past – therefore, it is important to treat the output and experience of the past as the foundation. The specificity of teachers' work and the roles they play depend on the position which teachers have in various social systems. Thus:

- in the global society, the teacher is a role model;
- in the social system of popularization of science – plays the role of an educator who consciously and actively shapes the personality of the young in compliance with a particular program;
- in the educational system – the role of a representative of school as a social institution;
- in the group of teaching professionals – the role of an expert in a particular subject;
- at school as a working place – the role of a worker who functions in compliance with the position, rank, working experience, etc. (Olbrycht K., 1998).

Teachers' work is of social nature and their activity depend on many groups and institutions which take part in the educational process, therefore – a teacher must be ready to collaborate with them. A contemporary teacher is expected to have extensive knowledge of the subject as well as social, cultural, pedagogical and psychological knowledge.

In order to prepare teachers for fulfilling so many roles, supervisors of pedagogical internships should have the skills of getting across the knowledge in a clear and comprehensible way, of developing students' intellect, broadening their interests and shaping the ability to learn on their own. Internship supervisors need to be wise, understanding, demanding but also friendly advisors who support future teachers in developing innovative attitudes. This concerns working on self-education skills, motivation and cognitive interests, independent and critical thinking, reliability and openness, and creative intellectual attitudes.

What seems crucial in the teaching profession is the teacher's personality. That is why it is also important to create situations in which students can discover their individuality, learn about themselves and their potentialities, become aware of the specificity of the teacher's work. A teacher – supervisor must be an enthusiast, as only a person with passion will be able to become an authority for the young – so

much needed today for supporting students in designing educational activities and planning their own path of life. It is essential as well to be interested in the matters of young people, to help in solving their problems, be ready to provide advice and aid, and react to difficulty and failure in the first steps in this responsible profession.

The model of a teacher – internship supervisor combines many traits into the personality model of a teacher who is an innovator, guardian, advisor, leader, organizer and democrat, fully responsible for the students and their future as well as for him/herself and his/her own development. The responsibility of teachers – internship supervisors is double – they are responsible not only for preparing a student for fulfilling the socially significant role of the teacher, but also for the future generation which would enter their life under this student's care.

To enhance students' development, the personalities should be shaped which are free and integrated, have initiative, and are able to act creatively and responsibly. All students need to be taught to be themselves and to be responsible for themselves, being responsible for others at the same time. Through their attitude and the implementation of the discussed values in their scientific and didactic life, teachers – supervisors should help students to discover talents, develop their activeness, raise motivation and willingness to seek and discover their own vocation, teach resourcefulness, understanding, respect for others, and provide the feeling of sense to students' every activity. A. Gurytska aptly noticed that nothing can free us, as people, from the responsibility for ourselves. These are we, people, who have to choose, decide, evaluate, assess, meet the consequences of our activities. This is what we call personal causality and what constitutes the basic criterion of subjectivity (A. Gurytska, 1989).

What seems to be the duty of internship supervisors is convincing themselves and the students that the most important is what they create for themselves and others in the process of individual self-fulfillment. Passing this down to their students, they will certainly feel that they educate not only wise but also noble people – people of ethical and moral culture, who are badly needed in the dehumanized world of today.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEDAGOGICAL INTERNSHIPS IN CONSTRUCTING THE PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOP OF FUTURE TEACHERS – A RESEARCH REPORT

The presented studies involved 111 respondents – pedagogy students educated in the teaching specialization: integrated pre- and early school education. All of them were female third year B. A. students (in the full time system) of the University of Silesia in Katowice. Choosing students of a teaching specialization was purposeful, as they are the people who most frequently implement internships in schools or kindergartens and their professional plans are usually associated with starting a teaching career.

In the undertaken studies, the following research problems were formulated:

- What significance do pedagogical internships have among the activities which shape future teachers' workshop?
- What qualities and skills should a teacher (internship supervisor) have in students' opinion?

The method of diagnostic poll was applied with the use of the questionnaire technique. The questionnaire was carried out in the second half of 2015.

The stimulus to conduct the research and analysis, aimed at presenting the significance of pedagogical internships for shaping future teachers' pedagogical competences, was the question formulated in the questionnaire sheet: Which activities shape the future teacher's professional workshop the most?

This received the following answers: participation in classes at university – 16 (14.41%); acquiring pedagogical knowledge through self-study (e.g. studying expert literature, etc.) – 7 (6.31%); implementation of pedagogical internships – 73 (65.77%); voluntary service – 15 (13.51%). The students did not mention any other activities as influential for their future professional workshop.

The obtained research results confirm the priority rank of practical activity implemented by students during their studies. The respondents' declarations have shown that both their obligatory internships and practical activities concerning voluntary service are essential in the process of constructing the teacher's professional workshop (in total: over 79%).

In the presented study, three platforms of didactic activities (within which teachers' pedagogical activity is conducted) have been referred to. With the awareness that all the platforms constitute an integral part of didactic activity, the question was asked whether, in the respondents' opinion, any of them was more important for the teacher than others. The results are presented below.

Future teachers attributed the most significance to the platform of methodological activity – 71 (63.97%), which comprises both didactic and interpersonal skills. What constitutes an important quality of this platform is the focus on respecting learners' subjectivity, partner relationships of all educational actors and (emotional) engagement in the conducted didactic work. The significance of the other two platforms was almost equal. The platform involving the recognition, explanation and interpretation of didactic facts and phenomena received 21 declarations, which makes 18.91%. The platform comprising teachers' creative, innovative attitudes received 19 (17.12%).

The collected data enable formulating the conclusion that any practical activities implemented by students (both teaching internships and other practical activities, e.g. voluntary service, in educational institutions) during pedagogical studies constitute an exceptionally important element of constructing their professional workshop. At the stage of preparing for performing the teaching profession, it is necessary to develop one's own skills and, first of all, the methodological knowledge of the taught subjects, which is also stressed by the respondents. Teachers' didactic skills and their attitudes are present in the respondents' declarations, however – at this educational stage they are treated as secondary competences.

In the next part of the research, the examined students were to indicate three most significant qualities in the teacher's work. The most high-rated qualities are: openness to children's needs and expectations – 61 (54.95), justice – 49 (44.14%), the skill of using didactic knowledge to explain phenomena in practice – 34 (30.63%), and sensitivity to learners' problems – 33 (29.72%). The remaining qualities indicated by the respondents received the following values: empathy – 30 (27.03%), lenience – 26 (23.42%), being a thoughtful observer and establishing positive relations with the colleagues and parents – 22 each (19.81%), objectivism – 18 (16.21%), assertiveness – 15 (13.51%), spontaneity – 12 (10.81%) and selflessness – 11 (9.90%).

What seems also important in the teaching profession are the teacher's skills. In future teachers' opinion, the most important skill will be enriching the classes

with appropriate didactic means – 44 (39.64%). As the next, the respondents ranked two skills: effective motivating of learners to work and the feeling of responsibility for the course and effects of didactic work – 41 each (36.94%). Respecting and accepting learners' subjectivity received 39 (35.13%). The lowest value was attributed to reflectiveness – 10 (only 9%). Among other answers, the respondents declared that a teacher should possess the following traits: not being afraid of questions asked by children 32 (28.83%); self-criticism – 29 (26.13%); using diverse methods – 28 (25.22%); planning classes as logically coherent entities and proper reacting to the classroom situation during a lesson – 21 each (18.92%); presenting high emotional engagement – 14 (12.61%) and the appropriate use of the native language – 13 (11.71%).

The third year B. A. students are a group which is experienced in the implementation of various internships. Due to their opinion that internship is the best way of constructing their professional workshop, they were asked which, in their opinion, traits of the teacher's personality recognized during obligatory practical activity could constitute the specific personality model of a teacher. The respondents could distinguish maximally nine traits which in their opinion characterize the teacher's personality model.

Justice gained a high value again – 55 (49.54%). The next qualities indicated by the respondents were: openness to children's needs and expectations – 51 (45.945), creative attitude 45 (40.54%), respecting and accepting learners' subjectivity – 42 (37.84%), and sensitivity to learners' problems – 40 (36.04%). The lowest value was attributed to the application of the knowledge concerning effective verbal, non-verbal and media techniques of communication, although it is objectively stated that communication skills are among the key abilities in the teacher's work.

Among the other traits attributed to the personality model of a teacher – internship supervisor, the respondents mentioned: not being afraid of questions asked by children; using diverse methods and enriching classes with appropriate means – 33 each (29.73%); empathy and self-demanding – 31 each (27.93%); spontaneity and proper reacting to the classroom situation during a lesson – 28 each (25.22%); objectiveness and lenience – 27 each (24.32%); being hardworking – 26 (23.42%); self-criticism and encouraging learners to develop critical thinking – 23 each (20.72%); orientation towards innovations – 21 (18.92%); establishing positive relations with the colleagues and parents, various institutions and updating the knowledge of the taught subject – 20 each (18.01%). The list of less frequently indicated traits comprised: selflessness – 19 (17.12%); being a thoughtful observer – 17 (15.31%); planning classes as coherent logical entities and active searching for opportunities for professional development – 16 each (14.41%); assertiveness, constant assessment of the effects of the teacher's own choices and acts in work for others, high emotional engagement – 14 each (12.61%); openness to modifications of the school reality, using didactic knowledge to explain phenomena in school practice – 9 each (8.11%); the appropriate use of the native language – 8 (7.21%); reflectiveness – 6 (5.4%).

The research results presented above confirm that future educators are aware that apart from the knowledge, which they should acquire in the process of university education and self-education, pedagogical internships are essential – in their opinion, of crucial importance. This is confirmed in the respondents' declarations concerning the platforms of didactic activities, where they emphasize the significance of the methodological platform.

The colloquial belief that everyone can become a teacher is disproved already by the next question, in which future teachers describe the characteristic features a teacher should possess: openness to children's needs and expectations, justice and the skill of using didactic knowledge to explain phenomena in practice, because these are the qualities which automatically disqualify many candidates.

The multitude of tasks which teachers face comes with the wealth of their personality traits and the undertaken activities. Thus, who, for a future educator, can be the model to refer to in self-forming and in acquiring pedagogical competences? Future teachers can distinguish the qualities and skills which the educators met at internships possess. It can be supposed that along with collecting bigger experience, the evaluation of teachers' priority personality traits and skills can change. Quite a different image of the teacher will probably appear when students join the group of professionally active educators.

CONCLUSIONS

Pedagogy students, future educators, are careful observers, who at the same time critically evaluate the teachers they meet on their educational pathway. The respondents are able to specify these teachers' qualities and the expectations concerning the personality model of an educator, at which they aim themselves. Equipped with theoretical knowledge, they gradually acquire practical experience, owing to which they construct their professional workshop.

In our study, an analysis is presented of two issues – the significance of pedagogical internships in constructing the professional workshop of pedagogy students and the qualities and skills of teachers – supervisors whom they meet at these internships. For the examined community of students of teaching specializations, it is particularly important to collect professional experience already at the stage of academic education as well as to use this period the most effectively for increasing methodological competences. Capitalizing on the experiences of teachers with whom they collaborate at internships or voluntary service allows students for elaborating their own individual style of work after university studies. The issue of the teacher's personality traits and skills has been extensively discussed here, therefore – it should be emphasized that the teaching profession requires complex theoretical and practical preparation, which comprises: the care for personal development of every teacher, nurturing various qualities and developing versatile skills which may be applied in everyday contacts with the school community. This was particularly emphasized by the respondents. Thus, the appropriate selection should take place of the institutions and teachers – supervisors for the implementation of practical activities, which are of crucial importance for students. What becomes essential in this context are personality traits, experience, knowledge, professional workshop and the skill of using all of them in work with children.

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