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Pedagogical praxis as a process of developing professional competencies in university education of future teachers

Mariana Sirotová *

"FF UCM, Nam. J. Herdu 2, Trnava, 917 01, Slovakia"

Abstract

Pedagogical praxis plays an important role in the pre-gradual preparation of teachers. As is the case with a doctor, a teacher must also undergo his practical preparation in a real environment with real subjects. The acquirement of professional competencies begins during the pre-gradual preparation and they are further developed in a real educational praxis. Hypothetically, we can talk about a covariant dependence between the length of a teacher's pedagogical praxis and the degree of development of his professional competencies. The degree of the mutual link between these two segments depends on several factors. Pre-gradual preparation of a teacher and a pedagogical praxis realized during this time is one of the most important factors influencing the teacher's future educational praxis and the development of his professional competencies. It is, therefore, necessary to pay an appropriate attention to the realization of the professional praxis not only from a theoretical point of view. The article presents an analysis of the opinions and attitudes of students of the FF UCM, who underwent pedagogical praxis and the opinions of their teacher-trainers. Through a questionnaire the students and the teachers expressed their views of the process of acquiring the key competencies within the pedagogical praxis.

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* Mariana Sirotova. Tel.: +421-33-5565279
E-mail address: mariana.sirotova@ucm.sk

1. Pedagogical praxis – the theoretical definition

Pedagogical praxis is an integral, but mainly an important, part of the process of pre-gradual preparation of teachers for all the levels of education. A teacher cannot be adequately prepared for his future profession without undergoing a practical training during his university study. With respect to its importance it is possible to find enough professional and scientific studies as well as research projects aimed at solving the theoretical, practical or legal problems of the pedagogical praxis. These sources, however, do not offer a united view of the methodological procedure in the types and the realization of the pedagogical praxis in pre-gradual preparation of teachers. We must then ask a question if it is even possible to achieve unity in the realization of the pedagogical praxis at all the pedagogical faculties and for all the study programs. In the system of teachers' education the pedagogical praxis has a different scope and structure at different universities. This fact is a result of the specifics of the various study programs, but also results from a non-existing legislative support in the Slovak Republic. The unity can, however, be found in the accentuation of the need for improving the quality of the pedagogical praxis and in the gradual realization of the specific types of the pedagogical praxis. Pedagogical praxis is realized mainly for the reason of developing the professional competencies of future teachers.

Several definitions of the pedagogical praxis can be found in professional literature. To work out a characteristic of the pedagogical praxis, it is possible to use a comparison of the stated theoretical definitions through identifying certain common signs. The first common feature is the inseparability and importance of the pedagogical praxis in pre-gradual preparation. Without the theoretical knowledge background of the teaching subjects, the pedagogical and psychological disciplines, the realization of the pedagogical praxis becomes impossible. The third common feature is the fact that the pedagogical praxis is a specific form of learning making up space for a creative activity of the student – trainee. The fourth feature is the feedback concerning the ability of applying the theoretical preparation into the school praxis. The fifth common feature is the development of the professional competencies necessary for the realization of the teacher's job.

Pedagogical praxis as a form of experience-based and professional learning enables the students of teaching (the trainees) to develop their professional as well as personal competencies in cooperation with the teachers –trainers and the university teachers in the realistic conditions of the school praxis of the training schools. It creates a base for the development of their own teaching style and it develops the skills for studying the quality and efficiency of own pedagogical activity through the process of self-knowledge, self-evaluation and self-reflection. Pedagogical praxis creates space for verifying the theoretical knowledge, methods, and procedures directly in the conditions of the trainee's practical performance in real conditions of an educational process. Thus it provides the trainee with an optimal process for the development of his key competencies of his future job.

The target of the pedagogical praxis is based on a graduate's profile and can be specified as the development of a positive attitude toward the teaching profession, a student's self-reflection, the cooperation with the teacher-trainer and the didactics teacher of the department of the chosen teaching subject and the development of professional competencies. During the course of the pedagogical praxis a student gradually acquires basic professional abilities such as: the planning ability, the managing ability, abilities necessary for the realization of educational units, abilities leading toward the facilitation of a positive climate in school and the class and toward sustaining the discipline, diagnostic abilities and auto-diagnostic abilities (Ivanovičová, 2007). The general target of pedagogical praxis is thus to achieve such a degree of the trainee's personality development in the area of professional and personal competencies that will make him capable to start performing his job after finishing his studies.

Based on the importance of pedagogical praxis in pre-gradual preparation of future teachers and its general target we were interested in how university students as well as the graduates performing the job of a teacher perceive the fulfillment of this target. The pilot survey of the students' opinions of the pedagogical praxis was performed at the department of pedagogy FF UCM in Trnava and these opinions were compared with the views of the teacher-trainers. As we are trying to vigorously integrate the theoretical and the practical preparation of teachers, in a sense of gradual system in which the key competences of a teacher are thoughtfully formulated, we were interested in the opinions of both sides about the development of the individual competencies through the process of pedagogical praxis.

We chose the key competencies of a teacher as the outline of the questionnaire. Based on the study of the competency models of several authors (Vašutová 2007, Petlák 2009, Kosová a kol. 2012, Danek 2014 a Frýdková 2015) we divided the competencies into three areas:

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