

## **New Competences in Slovak Teacher Training Programmes**

**Gadušová, Zdenka – Malá, Eva – Zelenický, Ľubomír**

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia  
Tr. A. Hlinku 1, 949 74 Nitra, Slovakia  
zgadusova@ukf.sk, emala@ukf.sk, lzelenicky@ukf.sk

**Prof. Zdenka Gadušová, Ph.D.**

Current position: the dean of the Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia

Research interests: methodology of foreign language teaching, teacher training

**Prof. Eva Malá, Ph.D.**

Current position: the vice-rector for international relations, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia

Research interests: English linguistics, ICT in teaching foreign languages

**Prof. Ľubomír Zelenický, Ph.D.**

Current position: the dean of the Faculty Sciences, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia

Research interests: methodology of teaching physics, teacher training

### **Introduction**

In recent years many countries have been seeking ways how to improve their schools, and to respond better to new social and economic expectations. The demands on schools and teachers have become more complex. Society now expects schools to deal effectively with different languages and student backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioural problems, to use new technologies, and to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches to student assessment.

Improving the efficiency of schooling highly depends on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students have access to high quality teaching. Teachers are now expected to have much broader roles, taking into account the individual development of children and young people, the management of learning processes in the classroom, the development of the entire school as a “learning community” and connections with the local community and the wider world.

Teachers also need to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to keep learning over a lifetime. This is why teacher issues are often a priority for public policy, and are likely to become even more so in future years.

## **Impact of Social Changes on the Role of Teachers**

Social changes, diversity of learner intake and changes in the teaching environment influence the role of teacher and have their impact on several areas of teacher's work:

1. promotion of new learning outcomes contributing to citizenship education of learners such as:
  - living in a multicultural and tolerant society;
  - living according to sustainable lifestyles regarding environmental issues;
  - dealing with gender equity issues in family, work and social life;
  - living as European citizen;
  - managing their own career development;
2. promotion of the development of competences of learners for the knowledge and lifelong learning society such as:
  - motivation to learn beyond compulsory education;
  - learn how to learn /autonomous learning;
  - information processing;
  - digital literacy;
  - creativity and innovation;
  - problem-solving;
  - entrepreneurship;
  - communication;
  - visual culture;
3. linking the development of new curriculum competencies with school subjects
4. working in restructured ways in the classroom
  - dealing with social, cultural and ethnic diversity of learners;
  - organising learning environments and facilitating learning processes;
  - working in teams with teachers and other professionals involved in the learning process of the same learners;
5. working "beyond the classroom" and with social partners
  - working in school curriculum, organisational development and evaluation
  - collaborating with parents and other social partners
6. integrating ICT in formal learning situations and in all professional practice
7. increasing levels of teaching professionalism
  - acting in an investigative or problem-solving way;
  - assuming greater responsibility for their own professional development in a lifelong learning perspective.

## The Concept of Teacher Competences

Traditionally the term teacher competence has often been perceived in terms of behaviour or in terms of individual psychological attributes. Evidence for teacher competences has been based on direct observation of performances and/or products in predictable situations, reflecting a technical concept of teaching. Teacher competences have been conceived in terms of underlying stable, personal, and situation-independent characteristics providing a basis for excellent performance.

The recent concern for teacher competence has been expressed as a need for a more integrated concept denoting teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in context while performing professional tasks. Scholars have been moving toward a more integrated approach to competence-based training and assessment, based on the notion that competence is a relational concept, bringing together the knowledge, skills and abilities of the individual and the professional tasks to be performed in particular situations.

Schools and classrooms are complex, dynamic environments, and identifying the effects of these varied factors, and how they influence and relate with each other for different types of students and different types of learning has been, and continues to be, a major focus of educational research. But there still are many important aspects of teacher quality that are not captured by the commonly used indicators such as qualifications, teaching experience and indicators of academic ability or subject-matter knowledge. The teacher characteristics that are harder to measure, but which can be vital to student learning include the ability to convey ideas in clear and convincing ways; to create effective learning environments for different types of students; to foster productive teacher-student relationships; to be enthusiastic and creative; and to work effectively with colleagues and parents.

Notions of competences as developable abilities of the person contrast with notions in much of the research of competences as discrete behaviours. The five abilities are identified as generic teaching skills:

- *conceptualization* – integrating disciplinary knowledge with educational frameworks and a broad understanding of human development in order to plan and implement learning processes;
- *diagnosis* – relating observations of behaviour and situations using frameworks in order to foster learning;
- *coordination* – managing resources effectively to support learning goals;
- *communication* – using oral, written and media modes of communication to structure and reinforce learning processes;
- *integrative interaction* – demonstrating professional responsibility in the learning environment.

Student learning is influenced by many factors, including:

- students' skills, abilities and attitudes expectations, motivation and behaviour;
- family and community resources, attitudes and support;
- peer group skills, attitudes and behaviour;
- school organisation, resources and climate;
- curriculum structure and content;
- teacher skills (teacher quality), knowledge, attitudes and practices.

The quality of the educational service, however, depends to much extent on the quality of our teachers as well. The standard then lists the following 4 components:

- professional values and personal commitments;
- professional knowledge and understanding;
- professional and personal attributes;
- professional action.

Very important are especially professional values and personal commitments which effective teachers should develop:

- effectiveness in promoting learning in the classroom;
- critical self-evaluation and development;
- collaboration and influence;
- educational and social values.

Besides professional values the teacher competences are certain qualities of the teacher which enable him or her to employ the individual competences and apply them in a professional context. The competences are grouped under the 5 areas:

1. understanding the curriculum, and professional knowledge;
2. subject knowledge and subject application;
3. teacher strategies and techniques, and classroom management;
4. assessment and recording of pupils' progress;
5. foundation for further professional development.

Some examples of areas of broadened teacher responsibility are as follows.

- ❖ *At the individual student level*
  - initiating and managing learning processes
  - responding effectively to the learning needs of individual learners
  - integrating formative and summative assessment
- ❖ *At the classroom level*
  - teaching in multi-cultural classrooms
  - new cross-curricular emphases
  - integrating students with special needs
- ❖ *At the school level*
  - working and planning in teams
  - evaluation and systematic improvement planning
  - ICT use in teaching and administration
  - management and shared leadership
- ❖ *At the level of parents and the wider community*
  - providing professional advice to parents
  - building community partnerships for learning

The 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers should have a profound knowledge of their subject area and have the skills to teach the students successfully. Among these skills the teacher shouldn't lack such ones as being able to:

- organize student learning opportunities;

- manage student learning progression;
- deal with student heterogeneity;
- develop student commitment to working and learning;
- work in teams;
- participate in school curriculum and organization development;
- promote parent and community commitment to school;
- use new technologies in their daily practice;
- tackle professional duties and ethical dilemmas;
- manage their own professional development.

## **Policy Priorities for Development of Teacher Competences**

Key issues in a teacher quality agenda include more attention to the criteria for selection both into initial teacher education and teaching employment, on-going evaluation throughout the teaching career to identify areas for improvement, recognising and rewarding effective teaching, and ensuring that teachers have the resources and support they need to meet high expectations.

Countries need to have clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do, and these teacher profiles need to be embedded throughout the school and teacher education systems. The profile of teacher competencies needs to derive from the objectives for student learning, and provide profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching. The teacher profiles need to encompass strong subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, the capacity to work effectively with a wide range of students and colleagues, to contribute to the school and the profession, and the capacity to continue developing. The profile could express different levels of performance appropriate to beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and those with higher responsibilities.

The stages of initial teacher education, induction and professional development need to be much better interconnected to create a more coherent learning and development system for teachers. A statement of teacher competencies and performance standards at different stages of their career should provide a framework for the teacher development continuum where much more attention will need to be focused on supporting teachers in the early stage of their career, and in providing the incentives and resources for their on-going professional development.

A more flexible system of teacher education should provide more routes into the profession, including through: post-graduate study following an initial qualification in a subject matter field; opportunities for those who started in schools as paraprofessionals or teachers' aides to gain full qualifications that build on their experience in schools; possibilities for mid-career changers to combine reduced teaching loads and concurrent participation in teacher preparation programmes. It should involve close linkages with schools.

Teachers need to be active agents in analysing their own practice in the light of professional standards, and their own students' progress in the light of standards for student learning.

Consequently, schools need to have more responsibility – and accountability – for teacher selection, working conditions, and development. However, to exercise these responsibilities effectively, it is clear that many schools will need more skilled leadership teams and stronger support.

### **Teacher Training in Slovakia**

Slovak institutions of higher education including our university – Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, have joined the European Higher Education Area ten years ago (in 1998) when the new higher education legislation was issued and the document *Further Development of Higher Education in Slovakia Policy for the 21st century – Millennium* was published (Rosa et al., 2000). Implementation of these documents creates the basis for the involvement of Slovak institutions of higher education into the established European Education and Research Area and for the reform of higher education institutions in Slovakia within 10 – 15 years.

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra has also introduced the main principles of Bologna declaration into their study programmes. One of the most important measures that the university has adopted in the field of study programmes has become introduction and implementation of ECTS in them. Among other recently introduced measures with a very positive impact on our students we could also mention the possibility to make decisions about the selection of contents and forms of education, the possibility to transfer credits gained during various forms of student mobilities and the system of academic degrees which is comparable and compatible within different European countries.

Teacher training in Slovakia before 1989 was closely connected with social and political situation in the country. Teachers were trained to work in highly homogenous environment of identical state schools with unified national curricula. Teacher training study programmes lasted five years and teachers were trained separately for primary schools (in all subjects) and separately for lower and higher secondary schools (in two subjects).

One of the consequences of entering the European area has become diversification of teacher training reflecting the real world where learners are educated in heterogeneous educational institutions providing different educational programme with variety of educational aims and goals. New legislation copying the Bologna principles has introduced three-year bachelor study programmes and two-year master study programmes for future teachers. However, we still lack legislation which would specify the role of graduates from bachelor programmes in our schools. Other frequently discussed topics are changes in teacher training curricula. Experts in education find it vital to change aims and contents of teacher training in such a way that not to be focused just on knowledge learning and acquisition but they require changes in the teacher training graduates profile which should reflect changes in professional attitudes, skills and abilities.

A fundamental requirement was determined in the Millennium project to change “subject” teacher training for training of educators who are able to cultivate a man and

his world and to improve training of school managers. The new teacher's profile has recently been put in agreement with the new curricula for primary and secondary schools where former individual school subjects (as for example: Slovak Language, Foreign Language, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, etc.) have been replaced by a complex of seven educational areas to be taught: Language and Communication, Man and Nature, Man and World, Man and Society, Mathematics and Informatics, Art and Culture, Health and Exercise.

### **A European Teacher**

Teachers in the European Union do not only educate future citizens of their particular member country, but also support them in becoming future generations of European citizens. They work within a national framework, which emphasises the need for a national identity as a basis for transnational awareness within a European society. The term "European Dimension" has been used to balance national and transnational values in educational policy making.

A European teacher should see himself/herself as someone with roots in one particular country, but at the same time belonging to a greater European whole. This co-existence of national identity and transnational awareness, diversity within unity is therefore a key aspect of a developed European identity with an open mind toward the world at large.

Besides that a European teacher has some knowledge of other European education systems and, possibly, of educational policy matters on the EU level. He/she values his/her own education system and views it in relation to other European ones. He/she has a knowledge of European and world affairs and is aware of European history and its influence on contemporary European society.

He/she has a positive relationship with his/her own culture and is open towards other cultures. He/she knows how to behave in other cultures in a confident and non-dominant way and sees heterogeneity as valuable aspect and respects any differences.

Then, a European teacher speaks more than one European language with different levels of competence and is able to teach subjects in languages other than his/her first language.

Furthermore, a European teacher has an education which enables him/her to teach in any European country, to exchange curricular content and methodologies with colleagues from other European countries, to pay attention to and learn from different teaching and learning traditions. Joint programmes and degrees offered by educational institutions in European countries can enhance the development of European professionalism, as can many of the opportunities offered by modern technology.

### **Conclusion**

If there is something like a European teacher, there must be some way of comparing the formal features of Europe's teacher education systems. An increase in

compatibility between European qualifications and in transparency of graduate achievement is central to the Bologna/Copenhagen processes, and would also remove obstacles from teacher mobility. That is why a European teacher experiences the benefits of the European Union in part through easy mobility. This mobility encompasses studying abroad and learning languages as well as getting acquainted with other EU countries' cultures. He/she may seek employment in other countries and use exchange programmes offered by the European Union.

Consequently, a European teacher facilitates mobility among his/her students by enabling them to have physical and virtual contact with peers in other European countries. This helps prepare for Europe-wide employability and, eventually, workplace mobility.

## Literature

- Blížkovský, B. (1997) *Systémová pedagogika*. 2. vyd. Amosium servis, Ostrava.
- Gadušová, Z. – Žilová, R. (2006) *Príprava učiteľa na jeho nové postavenie vo vzdelanostnej spoločnosti 21. storočia*. In: *Východiská kurikulárnych snáh v oblasti výučby cudzích jazykov*. Bratislava 2006, s. 63-71.
- Hašková, A. (2002) *Požiadavky praxe na zložky profilu učiteľov prírodovedných predmetov*. In: *Technológia vzdelávania X*, 4, 10 – 14.
- Hašková, A. – Klocoková, D. (2006) *Vnímanie postavenia učiteľa vo výsledkoch výskumu*. In: *Quo vadis vysokoškolský učiteľ*. s. 91 – 98. Trnava : FF UCM.
- International Consultative Forum on Education for All: Education for all: achieving the goal*. (1996) Final report of the Mid-decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All. Amman, Jordan, June 1996. UNESCO, Paris.
- Janíková, V. (2007) *Autonomní učení a lexikální strategie při osvojování cizích jazyků*. Brno, Masarykova univerzita, 210 s.
- Rosa, V. – Turek, I. – Zelina, M. (2000): *Návrh koncepcie výchovy a vzdelávania v SR : Projekt Milénium*. Slovdidac, Nitra.
- Sallerová, K. et al. (2007) *International Student's Guide to Slovakia*. SAIA, 125 s.
- Schools and Quality*. (1989) An International Report. OECD, Paris.
- Spilková, V. (1996) *Východiska vzdelávania učiteľů primárních škol*. In: *Pedagogika*, 46, 2/96, s. 135-146.
- Spilková, V. (1999) *Základní trendy ve vzdelávání učitelů primárních škol v zemích Evropské unie*. In: *Premeny pedagogickej zložky prípravy učiteľa I. stupňa ZŠ*. PF UMB, Banská Bystrica 1999, s. 33 - 43
- Squires, G. (1987) *The Curriculum Beyond School*. Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- Teichler, U. (1998) *The Requirements of the World of Work*. UNESCO, Paris 1998. ED-98/CONF.202/18
- Zelenický, Ľ. – Hašková, A. – Horváthová, D. – Rakovská, M. (1998) *Science Teacher Profile*. In: *Science Teacher Training 2000: Proceedings of the Conference*. MBU, Banská Bystrica, s. 32-35.