

Solving the Issue of Standards in Teacher Profession in the Slovak Republic

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It is certainly not coincidence that the tasks of one of the commissions of expert educationalists in the Slovak Republic are the same as the topic of the 30th ATEE Conference. This can be explained by the following fact: both the Slovak educational science and the school system have been accepting the West-European trends of educational thinking to a greater extent than ever before. We avail ourselves of a large amount of information in Slovakia that in the past did not penetrate into the so-called Eastern European Block to such a great extent. Being a member state of the EU, the Slovak Republic has prepared new educational documentation which is influenced by information and recommendations contained in the EU sources. Conclusions of the Lisbon Strategy, Bologna Conference and conclusions of individual Commissions for Education in the EU have been accepted in Slovakia in order to make the educational systems compatible. Our own historical points of departure, topical social needs, and visions of development, education, and culture of the country are, of course, also taken into consideration. The requirements of Slovak particularities are covered in the document called 'Millennium'. The so-called National Programme of Education represents main directions of development of the system of education after the year 1989 when the political orientation of the Slovak Republic changed.

A commission of expert educationalists has been working according to the Millennium document, as well as according to the requirements of the EU, whereas its objective is to create the professional standards of individual categories of educational employees – teachers.

Until now, the notion of a standard of teacher profession in the Slovak system of education has not yet been precisely defined. There has existed only a notion of teacher competence, but it was most frequently employed in "legislative" thinking, e.g. in relation to the rights of a teacher in maintaining the discipline of students, his/her possibilities of applying punishments,

and his/her powers as far as organizational tasks of school are concerned, etc. It was shortly before the year 2000, when our educational experts started to include such notions as teacher competence and standard of teacher performance into new relations and connotations. Nowadays the notion of teacher competence is not only used in the field of teacher's powers but also in the field of educational policy and development of curricula.

At present, such notions as teacher competence and standards of teacher profession have penetrated into the level of application in practice, predominantly due to the requirements of the EU. This means that the descriptions of frame competences and standards of teachers covered in the Concept of the Professional Development of an Educational Employee will shortly become part of the act on education in the Slovak Republic.

During our work in the commission, we encountered a number of essential methodological issues, such as:

- how to define the notions of teacher competences and standards?
- by means of which elements is one to discriminate their broader or closer understanding?
- how to apply knowledge of competences defined by personnel science?
- how is one to express the substance of the following competences: teacher competences, competences of a teacher, profession competences, competences for a teacher, and the like?
- is it correct to employ singular or plural: teacher competence or teacher competences? Are they synonyms?

As far as psychological context is concerned, no agreement has been made in respect of the issue, which of the components of

teacher's work and teacher's personality form the competence. We worked with several definitions of competences and standards by Czech and Slovak pedeutologists (V. Švec, J. Vašutová, J. Prucha, V. Spilková, B. Kasáčová, T. Janík, P. Urbánek), in which the most frequent suggestions contain the following: competences in the teacher profession and profession standards should involve the following: professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience, dispositions. Some authors employ psychological notions, such as: values and personal characteristics, intrinsic personality traits and those obtained by performing educational activities.

That is why we departed from international theoretical concepts on teacher's training and personality (Korthagen, Anderson, Combs, Hyland, Eraut, in Janík 2005) in our theoretical steps and with reference to Slovak and Czech pedeutologists (Švec, Kasíková, Lukášová, Kasáčová, Urbánek, Cernotová and others) we agreed on the following definition:

Profession standards are prescriptions that define necessary professional competences for a standard performance of the profession of an educational employee. These can be defined in the system of documentable competences. The standard of an educational employee determines the frame for graduates from individual study branches. It determines the profile of a university graduate with educational specialization, as well as professional and career growth and criteria of evaluation of an educational employee. (The material of the working commission at the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic 2005).

One can infer from the above definition that we employ both the notion of competence and the notion of standard. We understand competence as a product that defines effective acting of a teacher in individual levels of his/her activity and in his/her individual educational roles. The definition of the structure of competences is meaningful for professionalizing the teachers, for their evaluation, and for the definition of their professional identity. (Vašutová 2004)

After describing the problems in terminology, I am now going to focus on the description of practical creation of the methodology of determining the competences and standards in the work of the above commission.

The description of the work of the commission does not provide a final solution which, in fact does not exist. Our working definition of the notions *competences* and *standards* are understood in the process of transformation and results of our work will be the subject to new incentives and precise specification.

The question, whether the total image of a teacher can be at all defined validly and reliably by "the list" of teacher competences, has remained unanswered in the works of many Western authors (e.g. Korthagen, in: Janík 2005), as well as in our work. An additional approach might lead to an infinite list of requirements without any mutual relations. Despite its length, such a list would not answer the question, which of the teachers is a good one or what his/her substance is. That is why we have chosen the following:

We have tried to answer the question (and this is the question of ATEE, too):

- what are standards good for?
- Why do we need them?
- How they will help our system of education, individuals, schools, and students?

What for? – let me explain this. In a broader perspective: As has already been mentioned, the notion of teacher competence has not been employed in Slovakia so far and specifying and „proving“ specific teacher competences in pre-graduate training of students and in teacher practice has not been a

requirement. The main criterion of qualification (competence) for teachers starting their teaching career at primary and secondary schools was graduation from a university (e.g. Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Natural Sciences and other faculties with teacher specialization). Universities and school state administration considered as professionally "competent" such teachers who completed the prescribed subject, educational-psychological, and philosophical-theoretical training and a certain amount of hours of field training.

The part of competences, which was expected from a teacher, was knowledge. This was and still remains the main criterion for passing the final state examination. But (there is always a "but") our pedeutologic researches signalize that students – although well prepared as far as their theoretical knowledge is concerned - lack the ability of independent behaviour when starting their professional career. Research into students' reflexions show a deficit in practical training. It concerns mainly insufficient preparation for solving educational problems with students, problems in assessing the students, problems in diagnosing the students, and problems involved in cooperation with parents.

The respondents have admitted insufficient development of their personal traits – e.g. reliability, devotion, ability to cooperate. (Cernotová 2004, Urbánek 2005). The research show that the graduates lack that part of competences, which we call skills and attitudes. Their still undefined attitude is demonstrated e.g. by the fact that graduates refrain from the teaching career and leave schools in the adaptation phase – especially foreign language teachers, many of them experience the "burn-out" phenomenon, etc. Teachers leave for other professions and the teacher profession is performed by professionally untrained secondary school leavers or pensioners, which gives us a strong reason for specifying the competences and their standards. That is why the question "what for?" has been clearly answered by us. Standards should merely serve as a device of struggle against dilettantism, against the lack of qualification and competence of teachers. A profession standard will specify the teacher profession as an expert group and will serve for its protection.

- We assume that specification of competences and their standards in the Slovak Republic will gain in its international significance – it will contribute to comparability of teacher profession in Slovakia and in the European Union, as well. This will enable professional mobility, which has been very weak so far.
- Determination of standards will form the conditions for qualified personnel of the school work and it will contribute to high quality school management.
- Professional standards will allow one to compare the work of a teacher with other professions and with individual subcategories of educational employees.
- Competences and standards should become indicators not only for employing a teacher but also indicators of quality of the professional growth of teachers. If a definition of competences and their indicators exists, they will become devices of strategic and project quality management of further education of teachers at schools and part of personnel policy of school headmasters.
- Standards should determine the framework of pre-graduate and continuous education and the professional development of teachers in the career system.

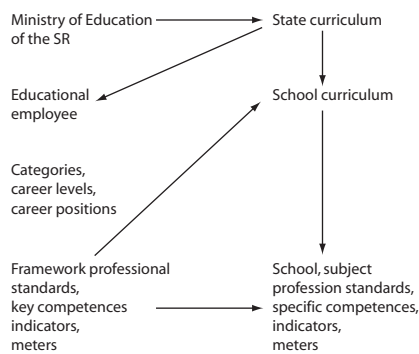
We have also answered the question "what competences (standards) define the quality of a teacher" as follows:

The commission working on the preparation of the methodology of standards consisted mainly of teachers – i.e.

university educationalists from different faculties, employees working in the field of further education, secondary grammar school headmasters, employees from the 3rd sector – i.e. non-state educational organization, and the representative of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic – alternately 5 to 10 people.

Before specifying and selecting the competences, i.e. the content of standards, we set up a scheme of main determining elements to specify the place of profession standards in the system of institutions and documents.

Documents of the EU



Moreover, we made use of the method of comparing international concepts and we made use of the brain-storming method.

We specified 3 key fields of professional teacher performance, in which “our” key competences should be denoted by a systematic approach according to the pedeutologic model of a Slovak author – (the so called integrating model of reflexive training of a teacher, Kasáčová 2003).

They are divided as follows:

The relation of the teacher to:

1. **the student (who is educated)** (competences related to the ability of identifying the properties of the student who enters the educational process),
2. **the educational process** (competences related to planning, performing, and evaluation of educational processes),
3. **professional self-development of the teacher/ tutor** (competences related to the role and self-improvement of the educational employee).

Our view of work and personality of teachers and other educational employees was then described, operationalized, selected, extended, and narrowed in the above 3 levels. In this way, the dimensions of the scheme arose, which will become the direction for determining the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes (according to the material: *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* and *The European Reference Framework* – November 2004 European Commission). Another commission of specialized theorists and practitioners will describe, determine, and operationalize individual details of competences and will specify the “norm” – quality, i.e. the standard according to the needs of the Slovak system of education and the proposals of the EU. The generic principle of specifying the competences will be the principle that will describe the teacher in his/her professional development and transformations. At this point, there are still many questions which have not been answered so far – e.g. the standard of the beginner and one of the so called expert teacher (See the table at the end of the paper).

The items in the table varied according to the following:

1. categories of an educational employee (e.g. teacher, tutor)
2. qualifications (i.e. university pre-gradual training of either Mgr. or Bc. study in the SR)
3. career degree (e.g. starting teacher/teacher, teacher with I. attestation, expert teacher, educational employee)
4. career position (managing educational employee, educational specialist)
5. competence profile
6. indicator of competence level

The structure of the table answers the questions “for whom and whose standards”:

The task of the team was to prepare the most general structure of the curriculum possible for specifying the competences and standards for the following categories:

- teacher, tutor, teacher assistant, and tutor assistant
- for the positions: managing educational employee and educational specialist.

Other commissions of experts will fill in the tables with specific indicators.

This methodology should ensure transparency, compatibility, and usability of profession standards in practice.

We have accepted the trend of European key competences in our work and the recommendations of expert commissions of the EU, but we preserved our national particularities and educational traditions. We think that we succeeded in expressing such features of the teacher profession that reflect the present transformation in our society, system of education, and policy of the so called knowledge-based society of Europe.

Specification of devices of competences evaluation and determination of level indicators will be subject to further development and work of the commission so as to define specific and particular knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individual educational employees. In this way it will be possible to prove that an educational employee develops competences, which are comparable with the profession standard and are documentable during his/her performance.

We are looking for inspiration for these steps of our commission work in the discussion on the conclusions of the 30th ATEE Conference.

Notes

- ¹ The scientific field, which in the interdisciplinary manner solves the issues of teacher, is in our educational science referred to as pedeutology
- ² Even if low remuneration has been the main reason for dissatisfaction in the teacher profession, in our recent research many answers by respondents also proved that money as such does not influence the attitude of the individual to the substance of the teacher profession. Numerous cohorts of students have requested that the quality of the practical part of the training of students be improved in such a way that it develops values and attitudes of personality. We have not succeeded in this for years. In order to eliminate this “problem,” a cultivated base of training schools and trainers needs to be established in Slovakia, also the attitude to teacher training in the management of faculties and departments has to change. But this is a different problem.

Scheme No. 2

Structure of a profession standard

Profession standard: teacher			
Category:			
Classification valid until now:			
Qualification presupposition:			
Career level:			
Competence profile			
Dimension	Competence	Indicator	
		Know- ledge	Skills Attitudes
Student	identify evolutionary and individual characteristics of students		
	identify psychological and social factors of their learning		
	identify socio-cultural context of the students' development		
Educational process	MEDIATION OF EDUCATION CONTENT		
	knowledge of the content of subjects taught		
	ability to plan and project the lesson		
	ability to set the lesson objectives oriented at the student		
	ability to make a psycho-didactic analysis of learning material		
	ability to select and perform teaching forms and methods		
	ability to evaluate the process and results of classes and students' learning		
	FORMATION OF THE CONDITIONS FOR EDUCATION		
	ability to create positive atmosphere in the class		
	ability to create and use material and technological background		
	INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' PERSONALITIES		
	ability to influence personal development of students		
	ability to develop social skills and attitudes of students		
	ability to prevent and correct social-pathological phenomena and defects in students' behaviour		
Self-development of the teacher	ability of professional growth and self-development		
	ability to identify himself/herself with the respective professional role and the school		

The profession standard of an educational employee (see the enclosures) specifies the following:

1. The category of an educational employee
2. Inevitable qualification presupposition of the educational employee
3. Career level of the educational employee
4. Career position of the educational employee (managing educational employee or expert educational employee)
5. Competence profile of the educational employee
6. Indicators of the competences level of the educational employee

Category of educational employees

A category of an educational employee (hereinafter "category") covers the entire list of competences of educational employees for the performance of their professions for the respective type of school and school grade or the kind of school establishment. Individual categories are as follows (see the enclosures A1 to A4):

- a) teacher
 - pre-primary education (nursery schools)
 - primary education (1st level at primary schools)
 - lower and higher secondary education (2nd level of primary school and secondary schools)
 - field training (foreman of vocational training)
 - special schools (special nursery schools, primary, and secondary schools)
 - teacher at school not providing a level of education achieved (basic school of arts, state school of languages, school of languages)
- b) tutor in
 - school establishments
 - special educational establishments
- c) assistant teacher and assistant tutor
- d) educational-counseling and therapeutic-educational employee
 - educational-counseling employee (school educationalist, social educationalist)
 - therapeutic-educational employee (special and medical educationalist at schools and school establishments)
- e) teacher in organizations for continuous (further) education of educational employees (enclosure A4)

Inevitable qualification presupposition of educational employees

The inevitable qualification presupposition of an educational employee (hereinafter "inevitable qualification presupposition") represents the required education completed for the respective category of educational employees for performance of their profession. Qualification presuppositions are employed in profession standards of educational employees which represent the following education completed:

- a) university education of the second degree ("Mgr.") in educational study branches,
- b) university education of the first degree ("Bc.") in educational study branches,
- c) education according to the regulations valid until now (the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic Decree No. 41/1996 Coll. on expert and educational competence of educational employees as amended).

Career degree of educational employees

The career level of educational employees (hereinafter "career level") is the service level of the career system that reflects the level of documentable knowledge of profession competences in different fields of the performance of profession, which an educational employee has acquired through programmes of continuous (further) education and self-education. There exist the following career degrees:

- a) beginning educational employee,
- b) educational employee,
- c) educational employee with the first attestation,
- d) educational employee with the second attestation,
- e) expert educational employee.

Career position of educational employees

The career position of educational employees (hereinafter "career position") represents the level of documentable knowledge of specific profession competences, which an educational employee has acquired through specialization or function-oriented education in career positions of a managing educational employee or expert educational employee.

Career positions are as follows:

- a) managing educational employee,
 - school headmaster or a headmaster of a school establishment,
 - school deputy headmaster and deputy headmaster of a school establishment,
 - head tutor,
 - head teacher of field training (chief foreman of vocational training)
- b) expert educational employee,
 - form master,
 - introducing educational employee,
 - training educational employee,
 - chairperson of the subject board and head of methodological association,
 - expert in specified educational activities (e.g. educational counselor, profession counselor, coordinator in drug prevention programme, coordinator of information and communication technologies, school librarian, and others).

Competence profile of educational employees

Competence profile of educational employees (hereinafter "competence profile") is the set of key competences and documentable competences, which characterize the performance of profession. Competences are documentable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other properties of personality, which are demonstrated in the performance of profession.

Competence profile of educational employees is formed by key competences and documentable specific competences resulting from them (competences) necessary for the performance of profession in individual categories and career levels of educational employees at schools or school establishments (see 3.2.1 and 3.2.3). Competence profile of an expert educational employee and a managing educational employee is formed by key competences and documentable specific competences resulting from them (competences) necessary for the performance of the given position (see 3.2.4).

General key competences result from the following three aspects:

- 1) **personal fulfillment and long-life development** – cultural capital (key competences should provide the people with the competence to find their place in life and develop their personal hobbies, aspirations, and longings through long-life education)
- 2) **active citizenship and inclusion** – social capital (key competences should create opportunities for everybody to actively participate in the life of the society) and
- 3) **employment rate** – human capital (opportunity for everybody to find employment on the job market)

Indicators of competences level of educational employees

The indicator of the competences level of educational employees (hereinafter "indicator") identifies and specifies the level of competences. It is both qualitative and quantitative indicator that reflects evidence-based knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educational employees. Where possible, creation of indicators anticipates operationalization, which means specification of specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Reliability and validity of an indicator depends on whether it affects specific competences.

The objective of creating the indicators is to create the devices for identification of the level of competences of an educational employee. This means that educational employees dispose of competences comparable with profession standards or they can be documentable during their performance.

Creation, structure, and usage of indicators result from specific competences for the respective category, degree, and position of an educational employee. The level of competences and their quality is ascertained through evaluation devices. Devices of evaluation of educational employee competences are the devices by means of which the level of competences in relation to profession standards in individual categories, degrees, and positions may be defined. They will be represented by standardized and non-standardized, qualitative and quantitative, evaluation and auto-diagnostic methods. The precise specification and creation of devices of competences evaluation will be subject to further development.

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