Teachers' Perspective on Wise Education

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to probe into the teachers' notion of wisdom and the teachers' wisdom itself. The study used a phenomenological approach where the experience of teachers was studied by using semi-structured interviews. The interview data were analysed using the qualitative content analysis complemented by some elements of quantification for visualization of a more holistic picture. The phenomenon of wisdom is described on the basis of teachers' values and experience. According to the teachers, wisdom comprises several aspects and is viewed as a dynamic process. The conclusions reflect the integrity of the phenomenon of wisdom, as well as the importance and prospects of further study of wisdom for its use in the work of teachers.

Keywords: wisdom, teachers, experience, emotions, dynamic process.

Introduction

Education is the most important part of the modern world and the state of the world as a whole depends on the condition and quality of education. The goal of education should be not only to provide fragmentary knowledge in different disciplines and to verify academic performance, but also to ensure the harmonious development of other aspects of the human personality. Training should help develop global thinking and sense of integrity, the ability to maintain emotional stability and a highly moral lifestyle. It is designed to develop in a person such thinking that could lead to a qualitative change in human activities and actions, to ensure the searching direction towards sustainable development. For such a complex task to achieve, it is not enough to reduce all educational inquiry on teaching, it is not even enough to transfer knowledge and information only. As new concepts such as social and emotional intelligence become more widely applied and understood, more educators are realising that cognitive ability is not the sole or necessarily the most critical determinant of young people's aptitude for flourishing in today's society (McCraty, 2015, p. 66).

Teaching is much more complex and it is not easily measurable, and classroom events are often unpredictable as teachers are aspiring to practical wisdom (Darling et al., 2007). Therefore, investigation of wisdom in the perspective of teachers and recovering practical wisdom in teacher education is an eternal and natural duty for research in pedagogy. The nature of wisdom phenomenon is complex and closely related to philosophy of education, since Dewey made this basic assumption (Semetsky, 2008).

Such a phenomenon as wisdom drew attention to itself, stating its opportunities for teachers to discover the wisdom via sustainable development. The importance of the phenomenon of wisdom lies, first, in that it reflects the highest stage of the integral development of man and surrounding, and is associated with the transformation of understanding into practical activity, which is especially important for education for sustainable development (ESD). One of the surprising aspects of the phenomenon of wisdom is that it is difficult to describe and study its complexity and multidimensional manifestation. Wisdom covers the root causes of being; it gives a person something more that no other science will ever give. From Aristotle's time, humanity knows that *wisdom is the most accurate of Sciences* and this essential idea was formulated by Wengert (2009) in short formulation, which is meaningful for education and teachers, i.e., *Wisdom and Will are higher than Intellect* (Wengert, 2009).

At present, there is an increasing interest in wisdom as a science that is able to overcome fragmentation and to restore the integrity of person, as well as determine the ways of sustainable development of society. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to investigate and determine the measures to be taken and the direction to move so that modern education meets the needs and hopes of people, so that they become wise. Academic inquiry is currently being devoted to acquiring knowledge. The idea is to acquire knowledge, and then apply it to help solve social problems. This needs to be changed so that the basic aim becomes to seek and promote wisdom – wisdom being understood as the capacity to realise what is of value in life for oneself and others (and thus including knowledge, know-how and understanding) (Maxwell & Barnett, 2008).

The present research was the initial stage of a more extensive study of wisdom in education and aimed at providing an insight of teachers into the idea of *wise education* and the *wisdom of the teacher* in order to obtain primary information, as well as, to clarify the issues studied and draw up a further research programme. The study of the experience of teachers and their views on the idea of wise education is important for understanding and determining the main component of the phenomenon of wisdom in education.

The interest in researching the wisdom phenomenon in education was a natural issue for the author in the context of his life experience, and also in the context of regional cultural life, in which the interaction between Lithuanian and Latvian cultures and overlapping of many values revealed themselves as the Baltic tendency to conserve wisdom through the development of cultural traditions and education. Cooperation with Daugavpils University and awareness of the holistic pedagogical perspective contributed to the author's interest in studying the wisdom phenomenon in teacher education. The research was initiated in a broader holistic perspective with a focus on spirituality, an essential feature of cultural and educational recognition, which is inseparable from the expectation of the evolutionary call of the human species for spirituality in its relationship with the world through an activity that cultivates an ecocentric world view (Salite, 1998). Since the end of the 20th century, ecological relations have been highlighted in teacher education at Daugavpils University and, in the broadest sense of education, there is focus on spirituality that embraces human and natural relations and the human being as the creator of spirituality itself. Aristotle's belief in education led the pedagogues of higher education institution to a deeper study of the specific task of education, phronesis (Aristotelis, 1995), the implementation of which nowadays became topical (Salite, Gedžūne, & Gedžūne, 2009; Salite et al., 2016). The idea of smart education emphasised in the Development Strategy of Daugavpils University and in the Teacher Education

Approach is also related to the expectation of a holistic science and transdisciplinary approach to higher education and teacher education (Development Strategy of Daugavpils University, 2016; Education Strategy of Daugavpils University, 2016). Since the beginning of the 21st century, in search of teacher education and reorientation of higher education to sustainability at Daugavpils University, the initial stage can be observed, which can generally be called the search for sense of integrity. In the beginning, it was searched through holistic insight into the complementarity of content and meta-content (Salite, 2000; Salite, 2002; Salite et al., 2005; Salite & Pipere, 2006; Salite, 2006; Salite, 2008; Salite, 2009), which opened the door to a wider use of the four-dimensional model of sustainable education for the strategic understanding of programmes, teacher education and higher education development (Salite, Ignatjeva, & Salitis, 2009; Salite, 2015), in which the sustainability phenomenon occurred. It is currently being studied in the context of contemporary Anthropocene era and its current quality (Salite et al., 2016; Fedosejeva et al., 2018). The use of a holistic approach was combined with the use of action research and therefore many phenomena relevant to human life and its perception were found, among which a special place was taken by the inseparable relation of the sustainability phenomenon with the action and the nature of the specific wicked problem of the sustainability phenomenon (Salite et al., 2016; Pipere, 2017; Fedosejeva et al., 2018), which required wisdom. Thus, a broader perspective of awareness of the wisdom phenomenon has been gradually found out that is evolving with the implementation of practical activity through decision-making based on wisdom of insight (Salite, Gedžūne, & Gedžūne, 2009). The current strategy for sustainable competence education is implemented on a global scale, where sustainability competence is an idea that cannot be interpreted without the use of the concept of smart education. In pedagogy, it can be called the *sense of integrity*, the content of which we find by the integration or synthesis of the content of ontological, epistemological and value experiences required for the content of the pedagogical perspective.

When starting the present research, the author had used the broadest perspective, which had been approved for years in education research at Daugavpils University, and at the beginning of the research the aim had been set to find out the teachers' understanding of wisdom and wise teacher, which is the characteristic of present teachers in Visaginas (Lithuania). At the beginning of the research, the author has focused on identifying the real personal and professional experience of teachers by using a case study of participatory action research.

With the beginning of the Anthropocene era, the growing technologization and fragmentation of the whole social life, the characteristics of culture and civilization did not contribute to interest in studying the phenomenon of wisdom (Lynch & Veland, 2018; Fedosejeva et al., 2018). Throughout the 20th century, the idea of wisdom lost its relevance in education and educational research. This was promoted by the ideology of authoritarianism, egocentrism, rejection of everything natural in favour of industrialization and mechanization. Now wisdom is a transdisciplinary concept and is researched by scientists of various fields and specializations, and, by definition, many scholars are at the initial stage of the study, and so far, there are no complete and concrete recommendations on this issue. The beginning of the scientific interest in wisdom was the study of healthy aging. Until 1975, scientists almost completely ignored wisdom.

The study of wisdom in the traditional paradigm consisted in the fact that scientists tried to study and understand the phenomenon of wisdom, exploring various fragmentary

attributes and qualities without affecting the integrity and dynamic process of this phenomenon. The research of fragmentary features could not give a holistic picture, and always scientists faced the elusiveness of the phenomenon of wisdom.

The study of wisdom in a holistic perspective opens up a dynamic adaptive evolutionary perspective (Kincheloe, 2008; Fedosejeva et al., 2018) and supplements it with a holistic pedagogy mission (Kincheloe, 2008; Salite, 2015; Jurgena et al., 2018; Žogla, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The experience and activity of teachers were evaluated using the following approaches: a phenomenological approach, a written semi-structured interview and a qualitative (with the elements of quantitative) content analysis. The teachers for the written semi-structured interview were chosen randomly, using their occupational characteristics, amongst the educational staff of the schools of Visaginas, Lithuania. Thirty people between thirty-two and sixty-three years old were chosen to participate. The semi-structured interview comprises seven questions presented as a questionnaire and ordered from general questions to more specific ones. The spider chart was used to quantitatively analyse each question and, by overlaying the diagrams, to overview the information obtained as a single complex.

Results

The results of the qualitative content analysis have allowed distinguishing groups of specific categories, which teachers identify as related to the general category of wisdom: (1) the knowledge of an aim; (2) the ability to adapt; (3) the knowledge of what is necessary; (4) the acquirement and implementation of experience (activity); (5) the qualities of will; (6) the values to be aimed at; (7) communicability.

Figure 1. Quantitative characteristics of wise people and wise teacher

The overlay of two diagrams (Figure 1) shows that a wise person, in the opinion of most teachers, is able to acquire and practically implement experience. A wise teacher is strong-willed, able to operate values, communicable and able to adapt. In the teachers' opinion, the knowledge of one's aim and the things necessary, as well as the acquisition and implementation of experience are not amongst the major qualities of a wise teacher.

Figure 2. Using the characteristics of wisdom in the context of reflection of educational practice

As we can see, the examples of wisdom in practice (Figure 2), recalled by the teachers from their own experience, remain in the scope of the qualities of a wise teacher.

Figure 3. Things to be learnt and taught to achieve wisdom

The overlay of three diagrams (Figure 3) concerning the possibility of getting a wise education reveals that, in the opinions of teachers, the most essential categories are the activities aimed towards acquiring and implementing experience. Other categories of wisdom are less important and vary depending on the question.

Qualitative Characteristics of Wisdom in Teachers' Perspective

Most of the teachers, as well as the results derived from the charts reveal that wisdom is manifested in a dynamic process and is primarily related to the right choice of the direction of an action:

"A wise person is the one who uses his/her knowledge in the thoughts he/she expresses and derives conclusions from them";

"Not only a wise human possesses knowledge, but he/she also knows how to implement it, as well as he/she can make conclusions and avoid reckless actions";

"The purpose of wisdom is to make the right decisions, choices and organise one's life in the right way";

"Children are ought to be taught to see the ways of solving a particular problem, providing them with an experience of the right way";

"Wisdom can be taught to children, if they are taught to think about actions, both their own and those of the others, and to analyse them";

"To receive a wise education is to be able to make the right choice both materially and morally. It is to be able to understand people and derive valuable lessons from your own and others' mistakes".

The Examples of Wise Decisions from the Teachers' Own Experience

These examples show how crucial it is to understand and use a context to benefit students and to make wise decisions.

"A student presented a work that was a complete nonsense. Nevertheless, he was praised and he received a good mark, as it was his first work ever";

"A student who is not very bright has been given a chance to continue her studies in order not to ruin her self-confidence";

"When students came into a class sleepy due to the daylight saving time clock advances, a teacher gave them a chance to relax a bit";

"A teacher has advised a father of a behaviour-wise problematic student to solve the problem via the head of a hobby group the student has attended, and not to do anything himself. A student listened to the advice of the person he respected and who decided if the student could continue doing his favourite sports".

In the opinion of teachers, a wise decision does not necessarily mean to be logical. The manifestations of wisdom are related to understanding, attention and friendliness towards students, as well as to the skill to make exceptions from the rules, when it is

necessary to support students. Such supportive actions include: (1) *solving conflicts*, (2) *advising*, (3) *creating a comfortable atmosphere*, (4) *motivating*, (5) *providing moral support*, (6) *helping to adapt*.

Discussion and Conclusions

Analysing the research data on the traits that teachers perceived as wisdom recognition, it was found out that the wisdom phenomenon was complex in nature and not sufficiently assessed as a complex in educational research and education policy. Wisdom cannot be seen only as a specific content or decision without the external and internal contexts associated with them. Discerning the nature of wisdom requires a holistic perspective of pedagogy. The fact that wisdom is a dynamic phenomenon was understood by analysing and grouping together the traits of wisdom named by teachers and examples of wise action cases. It was the qualitative evaluation of the data that revealed the need to see the wisdom phenomenon in a broader framework, so that one could understand the direction of action and the specific integrative nature that became visible only within the framework of an individual's activity, in which the individual's experience, knowledge and conclusions were related to a particular context of the situation and became the basis, which was used by the individual to make his/her own decision.

Thus, it has become evident that it is necessary to take into account (1) the contextual nature of the wisdom phenomenon, which is directly related to learning, and supplemented with teaching, (2) that wisdom manifests itself through action and (3) has significant experience which the individual uses to structure his/her experience according to the purpose of the activity.

Consequently, a wise action is used to identify the purpose of using knowledge and conclusions for responsible organisation of life. Wisdom serves to determine the direction of action and by nature it is a dynamic process. If experience, knowledge, or use of conclusions in the wisdom phenomenon serve the purposeful achievement of life's tasks and aims, the basis of wise action and thinking should be sought in the integration or synthesis thinking and its implementation in action.

The need for a synthesis approach and use in science and education has long been known since Aristotle's time, as called for by the holistic approach and investigations of synergy issues. The research, in which the author has attempted to find out the teachers' beliefs about wisdom and teachers' wisdom, gives confidence that educational research aimed at improving the quality of education should be based on the phenomenon of wisdom, and within and around it there should be the reference system, in which the nature of sustainable education should be sought through the development of wisdom. From the perspective of the wisdom phenomenon, this is the way we can implement holistic programmes that will serve as the development of phronesis or insight of wisdom, rather than knowledge, the human-like capability that is known as wisdom, which is a feature of sustainable holistic pedagogy that should be put into the centre of sustainable education.

The research, which looked for a general opinion of teachers on wisdom and wise teachers from a broader perspective of wisdom as a phenomenon characteristic of sustainability, suggests that (1) we can trust the general meaning of wisdom that has been accumulated in human experience and also in the heritage of pedagogy, which has

especially remained in teacher education as the core of the teacher's ability to recognise the essential qualities of the teacher's mission within the framework of his/her personal and professional experience; (2) teachers in the recognition of wisdom refer to individual features of wisdom and complex traits that indicate the personality quality in a more holistic perspective, (3) we can trust that wisdom recognition is natural to every human being and is evolutionarily polished and continued with the accumulation of each person's experience and ability to recognise wisdom in attitudes and relationships.

The traits identified by the teachers for recognising wisdom can be generalised by the fact that Lithuanian teachers involved in the research trusted their experience by recognising the features associated with the quality of a wise teacher personality. These features have been identified from their own personal experience by recognising different contexts in it and structuring it within the framework of their personal reporting systems.

The research has demonstrated great potential and the importance of further study of the wisdom phenomenon:

- The possibility of further development of the wisdom phenomenon for practical use by teachers in their activities as an integrated and holistic system of upbringing and development;
- The possibility of constructing a dynamic model for wise decision-making and testing its efficiency.

The research of only one case has shown the versatility of the phenomenon of wisdom in the educational process, and the importance of its use by teachers in their professional activities for reorienting to education for sustainable development.

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